



SUSPICIOUS MINDS
WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE
CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

MANIKIN IN THE MINE ARTHUR MACHEN AND THE FOREST OF DEAN
SCIENCE FICTION AND FORTEANA BRIAN STABLEFORD INTERVIEW
2020 VISION HOW TO DO UFOLOGY IN A CONNECTED WORLD

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WEIRDEST
NEWS**

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

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JACK CHICK

THE CARTOONIST
WHO TERRIFIED
SINNERS INTO
SEEING THE LIGHT



**PAGAN
POLICE**

INVESTIGATING
BRITAIN'S OCCULT
CRIMEWAVE

**WOMEN
IN WHITE**

HAUNTING
ENCOUNTERS WITH
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CENTRE FOR FOLKLORE, MYTH AND MAGIC



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FORTEAN TIMES 389

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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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PAUL ELLIS / AFP / GETTYIMAGE

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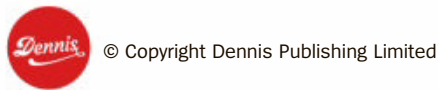
FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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Fax (+1) 757-428-6253 email cs@imsnews.com
Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)330 333 9492

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PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,
31-32 ALFRED PLACE, LONDON, WC1E 7DP

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM GIBBONS & SONS LTD

DISTRIBUTION
Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide
by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk
Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES
12 issues: UK £48; Europe £58; Rest of world £68
US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

Fortean Times, ISSN 0308-5899, is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica, NY 114314, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP, UK.
Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED GROUP CFO/COO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHIEF EXECUTIVE COMPANY FOUNDER	BRETT REYNOLDS KERIN O'CONNOR JAMES TYE FELIX DENNIS
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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
ABC 14,816 (Jan-Dec 2018)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
© Fortean Times: JANUARY 2020

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

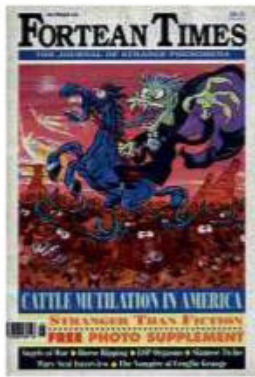
TIME LORDS OF FORTEANA

The year definitely got off to an auspicious start for us, with a completely unexpected appearance by *Fortean Times* in the first episode of the new series of *Doctor Who*! While we were extremely chuffed, it turned out that it wasn't the good Doctor but none other than (SPOILER ALERT!) the Master – evil Time Lord and nemesis of the Doctor for decades – who not only reads *FT* but owns a complete set of back issues “in mint condition”.



A screen grab provided by another *FT* reader shows that the issue on display in the episode is FT68, from way back in April 1993. Opening a copy now (yes, like the Master, we have a complete collection, though not necessarily in mint condition) transports us to another fortean country, where some things were certainly done differently. The editorial page includes youthful-looking photographs of Bob Rickard and Paul Sieveking. The cover story was ‘Cattle Mutilations in America’. Other topics included a horseripping epidemic in the home counties, fortean phenomena in the Philippines, the orgasm-inducing Russian faith healer Boris Zolotov, airborne manhole covers, Siamese twins, the Croglin Vampire, the Angels of Mons, and the latest conspiracy theories (the Illuminati, the New World Order, Dulce, Nazi cloning experiments!). John Michell surveyed 1992's harvest of crop circles, Robert Anton Wilson had a pop at the dogmatic ‘religious’ fervour of ‘skeptics’ and Brian Inglis considered the tangibility of apparitions; sadly, none of these esteemed contributors is with us 27 years later. One might say the same about crop circles as a fortean topic, although militant ‘skeptics’ have demonstrated greater longevity.

As well as providing a window onto a vanished fortean world, the appearance of a vintage copy of *FT* in *Doctor Who* provoked an interesting and paradoxical discussion on Twitter. @paradbaze asked: “I assume there has been at least one article about *Doctor Who* in *FT*, so does that mean there is a *Doctor Who* TV series in the *Doctor Who* universe?!”



Of course, in FT318 (Sept 2014), Paul Cornell looked back at the long history of fortean themes in the series. So, the answer is yes...

@SMClabby added: “I had a couple of letters published in *FT*, so does that mean *I* exist in the *Doctor Who* Universe?” We can only suppose that we must *all* now exist in the *Doctor Who* universe... and have done for some time...

Meanwhile, if you were expecting to find Paul Sieveking's reminiscence of his decades as *FT*'s newsman in this issue, don't worry – it will be appearing next time.

ERRATA

FT384:28: Rachel Hazard noticed a geographical error in the caption below the photo of the Little AleInn – Rachel is in Nevada, not New Mexico.

FT386:21: This issue's MythConception should have been called ‘Can You Smell Burning?’, but instead bore the title ‘Blue Blood’. This was an unintentional repeat from MythCon 326 in FT379.

FT386:26: Paul Mathewson corrected us on a point of RAF history: “In Jenny Randles's excellent UFO casebook story relating to the RAF Javelin encounter in 1956 she refers to the 46th Squadron. The former Royal Flying Corps Squadron with a proud history is in fact 46 Squadron; a small mistake but one which I couldn't let go.”

DAVID R. SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

NO NEED TO SEARCH THE SKIES

THE PERFECT
ForteanTimes
GIFT IS CLOSER
TO HOME



T-SHIRT



MUG



TEA TOWEL

DISCOVER FT'S NEW RANGE OF GIFTS AT
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

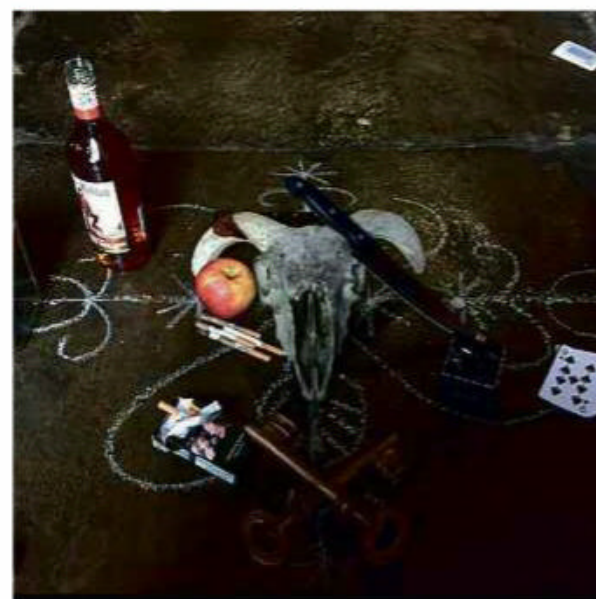
STRANGE DAYS

OCCULT CRIME WAVE

A series of 'Satanic' sheep killings grips the New Forest – but the Pagan Police are investigating

In an echo of Dr Eric Dingwall's work as a police consultant on criminal cases with occult angles [see FT300:50-54], the Police Pagan Federation (PPA) have been called in to assist Hampshire Constabulary, who are investigating a series of grisly crimes with elements of black magic in and around the village of Bramshaw. During November 2019, two sheep were found to have been stabbed to death, with pentagrams and the number '666' spray-painted on them, two heifers stabbed in the neck, and the exterior and interior of St Peter's, the village's parish church, was desecrated. Inverted crosses and phallic symbols had been spray-painted in gold on church doors and windows. Nearby road signs and noticeboards were similarly defaced. Three cows were also found stabbed in nearby Linford.

The 200-strong PPA was originally formed in 2009 as a support group for Pagans within the police force, but its members' expertise has subsequently been drawn upon during probes into horse maiming and attacks on churches. Sergeant Andy Pardy, the PPA's head, pointed out that whilst the pentagram is "a very emotive symbol" that "always creates a furore", its appearance is unlikely to be connected to practising Pagans at all, but may simply be due to children messing about, or a mentally ill individual. Use of inverted crosses and the number '666' does not suggest Paganism, but rather some form of black magic, or indeed teenagers re-enacting a Hammer horror film or Midsomer Murders episode.



ABOVE LEFT: One of the sheep found stabbed and marked with a pentagram. ABOVE RIGHT: The mysterious Todmorden veve.

Villagers deny that local children could be responsible, pointing out that everyone knows everyone else's business in this small close-knit community. "It's absolutely not local kids", says Mike Mills, who runs the village's only shop. The Rev David Bacon, 57, vicar of St Peter's for the past 15 years, said: "There's been witchcraft round here for hundreds of years – the New Forest is well known for witchcraft and black magic happening, and this has obviously gone up a level." During this time, he said, there have been five small incidents: "Little rings of stones left on the church's doorstep, for example. I think they're just letting us know they are there. But they never come out of the shadows". Light and darkness were the themes of his sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

In identifying local Pagan groups, the PPA is not only examining possible suspects but offering support in case of a backlash. Simon Wood, a former

police officer and a member of the New Forest Pagans of Ytene group, said: "There are lots of clans in the New Forest. 20th-century Wicca's founder Gerald Gardner was associated with the area, and in the 1950s (see FT267:39), the prominent witch Sybil Leek lived in the village of Burley, a few miles from Bramshaw; but discrimination against Pagans is still widespread and we often find ourselves on the receiving end of abuse from local people when we hold our open ceremonies, for looking different, dressing different. There is a worry among us that this could be the work of someone trying to paint us in a bad light when really we are just as appalled as anyone else".

In late December, another sheep was found dead, "slit from neck to crotch with entrails removed" and sprayed with "Satanic symbols", in the village of Boldre in the New Forest.

Meanwhile, residents of Todmorden in West Yorkshire were puzzled recently by what

appeared to be a Vodou veve (a symbol representing a particular loa, saint or spirit in the Vodou pantheon (see FT140:32-38), chalked on the pavement. It was found by a window cleaner early in the morning of Thursday 19 December 2019, and according to the Twitter account Centre for Folklore, Myth and Magic, that posted the photograph, "local business very unsettled as worried whatever is meant is aimed at them". The display is somewhat unclear; the chalked veve and the crossed keys are indicative of Papa Legba, guardian of crossroads and opener of ways, who is called upon before any others may be petitioned, whilst the rum and cigarettes are generic Vodou spirit offerings. The goat's skull and black candle, however, are atypical of Legba, whose day is Monday, not Wednesday or Thursday. Strange doings are afoot. *BBC News*, 22 Nov; *metro.co.uk*, 24 Nov; *D.Mail*, 25+30 Nov, 5 Dec; *Times*, 30 Nov; @CentreMyth, 19 Dec 2019.



FESTIVE SURPRISES

Strange stowaways in Christmas trees

PAGE 10



TWILIGHT CHILDREN

The bizarre case of the Turpin family

PAGE 16



THE FACE-HUGGER FISH

Or is it really a new species of sea anemone?

PAGE 24

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Forget the Twitter hysteria about WWII, says **NOEL ROONEY**, it's another American civil war we should be worrying about – at least according to rumblings from the Conspirasphere

CIVIL WAR CRIES

The rhetoric of the alt-right and the patriot movement regularly adopts a vague bellicosity that hints at the potential for civil war, or a militarised patriotic response to government (or Deep State) activity. This aggressive defensiveness has always been part of the American political scene, so it's hardly a surprise that the language of war has infected parts of the Conspirasphere fairly frequently. The notion that some core set of principles is under attack and needs to be defended at all costs is implied in conspiracist thinking.

But recently, the war rhetoric has been ramped up a notch or six, and the vague timelines and targets have begun to coalesce into something much more specific and worryingly tangible. This is not unprecedented (have a look at the kind of vitriol bandied about in the 1930s; there was a clear sense of imminent upheaval, and a simmering certainty that civil war was about to break out) but it is as warlike, or more so, than at any time in the recent past. The collective trigger finger of the patriot community is itchy and twitchy.

The coming year seems to have taken on an alarming apocalyptic significance for some sections of the alt right, and the main focus of their concerns is the immediate future of Donald Trump. His impending impeachment hearing, and the prospects for his re-election campaign, have persuaded many conspiracists that 2020 will be the year when things come to a head. The signs are there for those with eyes to see them.

A leading voice in the rumours-of-war chorus is Mike Adams, aka the Health Ranger. Adams has made a career out of a pungent, and peculiarly American, mix of alternative medicine, wholefoods, survivalist paraphernalia, Big Pharma and Big Government conspiracies and, more recently, cheerleading for an imminent internecine war in a country so politically polarised that the prospect of civil conflict

is all too plausible, and perhaps not just to those on the conspiracist right. And like any competent prophet of doom in an age of listicles, he has provided checklists of signs that the big day is here.

Trump winning re-election is of course one of those signs, but so is Trump losing the election (in which case the Democrats will emerge in full gun-grabbing revenge for four years of illusory patriot freedom). Trump being impeached (the Democrat coup finally accomplished) is a trigger, and so is Trump surviving the impeachment hearings (the Democrat coup will need to be tweaked to include assassination). A casual observer might conclude that Mr Adams is hedging his apocalyptic bets here; but he provides arguments for each possible outcome, and there is a kind of logic to what he says.

Perhaps the most outwardly plausible trigger for conflict is a major 'grid-down' event: power outages, breakdown in electronic payment systems, lack of food stamps leading to popular riots. An accidental grid-down situation would certainly be volatile and dangerous; but Adams is more concerned with planned events, such as the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, plotting to de-power the state's major cities so that California can be "invaded and occupied by Communist Chinese troops". Or traitors like Michael Bloomberg turning off the coal-fired power stations and plunging the country into the hell that is a green economy, where you will be forced to "wipe your ass with ferns while praying to Gaia".

Adams is by no means alone in predicting big bad things for the coming year; the ominous rumble of war can be heard across the Conspirasphere. And now that Q is back (the dust having finally settled on 8-Chan's recent troubles) and Trump-oriented conspiracism is centre stage again, 'the storm is coming' may feel less like an off-the-cuff Trumpism and more like a martial message from the top.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

NEW DINOSAUR FOUND HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUM

Guardian, 5 Aug 2019.

Fire truck-driving elf in RFS battle over scarecrow incident

Sydney Morning Herald, 10 Aug 2018.

MIGRATING RUSSIAN EAGLES RUN UP HUGE DATA ROAMING CHARGES

BBC News, 25 Oct 2019.

Angus man who tried to fly drone into Perth prison claimed Romanian circus stole his chihuahua

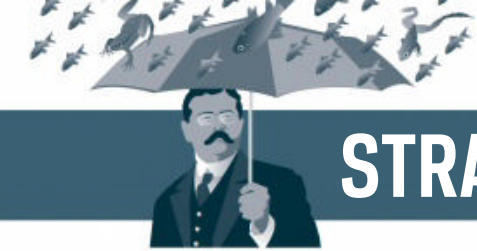
Dundee Courier, 25 Oct 2019.

ANTS IN FLORIDA COLLECT THE SKULLS OF OTHER ANTS TO DECORATE THEIR NESTS

Newsweek, 16 Nov 2018.

Big foot is found... in Hull

Sun, 28 Sept 2019.



SIDELINES...

DONNA TIPPETT HERE

A 39-year-old woman was caught dumping a trampoline and mattress in woodland near her home in Plymstock, Devon, and was hit with a court bill for £1,000. Her name was Donna Tippet. *D.Mirror, D.Star, 23 Nov 2019.*

PLUMMET #1

When Linda Taylor-Whitt and her family returned home to Lynwood, Illinois, on 5 October, they found a wheel lodged in the bathroom ceiling. SummerSkyz, Inc., a flight school operating a helicopter at Lansing airport nearby, took the blame. The wheel was from machinery used to move helicopters between airport hangers and had somehow stayed attached to the chopper before falling off above her home. *[UPI] 8 Oct 2019.*

PLUMMET #2

In late October a woman was in her house in Brilles, Warwickshire, when she heard “a strange loud thud”. A chunk of yellow metal casing had fallen from an American B-52 based at RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire, and slammed into her front garden. *Sun, 30 Oct 2019.*

RODENT HELL

On 8 October, authorities seized 320 rats from a van near Del Mar in San Diego, California. They had clawed into upholstery, burrowed into seats and gnawed engine wiring. The woman who lived in the van started with just two pet rats; but rats can give birth every four weeks and produce a dozen young in a litter. The woman acknowledged things had got out of control. More than 100 rats were ready for adoption. The woman, meanwhile, found a new place to stay. *[AP] 18 Oct 2019.*



BACK FROM THE DEAD

More souls turned away from the Pearly Gates



ABOVE: Audrey Schoeman celebrates her “miraculous” recovery from cardiac arrest with Dr Eduard Argudo. BELOW: ‘Miracle Man’ Joao Araujo made a similar comeback.

A 34-year-old woman whose heart stopped for a record six hours was brought back to life by doctors in a Barcelona hospital. Audrey Schoeman, an English teacher born in Kent but who resides in the Spanish city was hiking in the Pyrenees with her husband Rohan Schoeman, 36, on 3 November 2019. They became lost during a blizzard and sheltered behind a rock for several hours, where Rohan managed to phone friends and alert emergency services.

By this time, Audrey had no pulse – hypothermia had triggered cardiac arrest. When rescuers reached her at around 3.40pm, she was displaying no vital signs; nevertheless, when she arrived by air ambulance at Barcelona’s Vall d’Hebron Hospital at 5.45pm, her body temperature was 18°C (64.4°F), half the normal 37°C (98.6°F), and in addition, her lungs and kidneys were failing. Nevertheless, doctors thought there was a slim chance of survival – because the hypothermia had set in prior to the cardiac arrest, they hoped her frozen brain might not have deteriorated during the period it was not receiving blood (or oxygen), since, effectively in a state of suspended animation, it required neither.

They hooked her up to an ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, aka a life support machine), which replaces the functions of the heart and lungs.

When rescuers reached her, she was displaying no vital signs

The patient’s blood is pumped from their body to an artificial lung where carbon dioxide is removed and oxygen added, then pumped back into the body. In this case, the ingoing blood was gently warmed so that her body temperature gradually increased. When it reached 30°C (86°F), medics attempted to start her heart again using a defibrillator, eventually succeeding at 9.46pm – at least six hours after she had first lost consciousness. She was heavily sedated for 48 hours but woke three days later and began talking, leaving hospital after 11 days with no apparent side-effects other than some sensitivity and mobility difficulties with her hands.

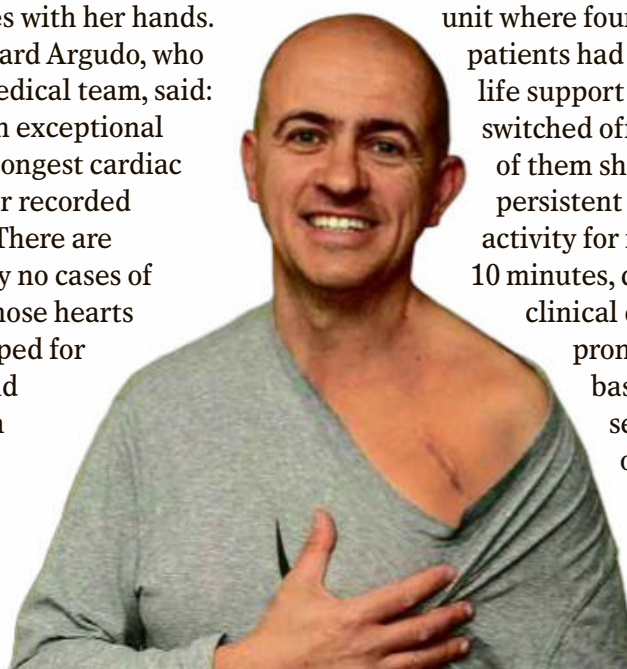
Dr Eduard Argudo, who led the medical team, said: “This is an exceptional case, the longest cardiac arrest ever recorded in Spain. There are practically no cases of people whose hearts have stopped for so long and have been able to be

revived”. Audrey Schoemann recalls little of her rescue. “The more I learn the more miraculous it seems”, she said. “I’m incredibly lucky. I feel so incredibly grateful to all the doctors, medics and rescue teams”. Despite her brush with death, she is keen to go mountain hiking again as soon as she is able.

Earlier in 2019, Joao Araujo, 48, from Linden, Gloucester, baffled doctors after being admitted to hospital with a cardiac arrest, which occurred suddenly as he drove his wife to work (FT386:20). Medics attempted to revive Mr Araujo, at the time a lorry driver, with injections and CPR, but after six hours they pronounced him dead. As he was being wheeled to the morgue, nurses spotted signs of movement – and tests indicated that his circulation had somehow returned. He remained in a coma for three days, and doctors warned relatives that his brain might be permanently damaged due to a lack of oxygen over a 21-minute period. He woke up, initially confused and disorientated, but after two weeks his condition had dramatically improved such that he was discharged and returned to work a week later.

The medical team responsible for Mr Araujo’s care had no exact explanation, recording “spontaneous return of circulation” on his notes. On the cardiac ward at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, he became known as ‘Miracle Man’. He said of his mysterious return from death: “It changed me. I say thank you that I am alive, thank you that I have a job”.

Another strange case was observed during a study in a Canadian intensive care unit where four terminal patients had their life support systems switched off. One of them showed persistent brain activity for more than 10 minutes, despite clinical death being pronounced based on several observations,





ANDREW YATES / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES + PAUL ELLIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

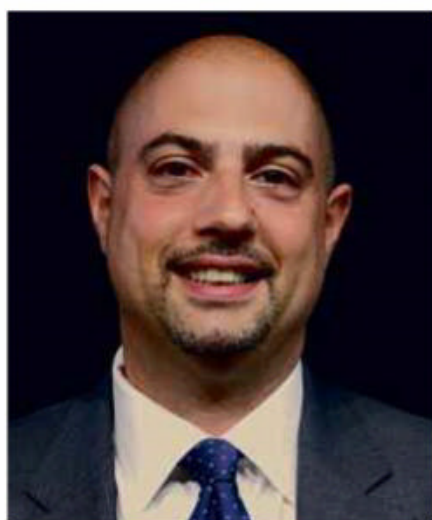


ABOVE: Footballer Fabrice Muamba gives thanks for his recovery after he collapsed during a 2012 game and was pronounced dead from a heart attack. **BELOW:** Dr Sam Parnia has been carrying out studies into consciousness after clinical death.

including no pulse and unreactive pupils. The patient appeared to be undergoing the same brainwaves (delta wave bursts) as we experience during deep sleep. This was distinguished from the sudden ‘death wave’ observed in rats one minute after decapitation in a 2011 study, whose researchers at the Netherlands’ Radboud University interpreted as reflecting “the ultimate border between life and death” (see **FT368:36-43**). However, such massive waves were not observed in any of the four patients in the study, conducted by the University of Western Ontario. Its research team suggested that death may be unique to each individual, since each of the four patients’ frontal electroencephalographic (EEG) recordings showed few similarities both before and after death was declared.

Struggling to explain this persistent brain activity after the heart had ceased functioning, the researchers wondered whether the results were due to an EEG recording error – but the equipment otherwise showed no signs of malfunction. “It is difficult to posit a physiological basis for this EEG activity given that it occurs after a prolonged loss of circulation”, said one. “The waveform bursts could be artefactual [i.e. due to human or machine error] in nature, although an artefactual source could not be identified.”

While this may seem frustratingly inconclusive, it is not atypical of research in the relatively new and rather niche field of necroneuroscience,



where other oddities have been observed. A pair of 2016 studies found over 1,000 genes still functioning several days after death. They had not simply taken longer to die off; this gene activity was observed to have *increased* at the moment of death.

Neither Audrey Schoeman or Joao Araujo appear to have any recollection of their state of mind during the period in which they were clinically dead, which is unsurprising, given that a lack of brain activity is one diagnostic sign of death. However, in March 2012, footballer Fabrice Muamba collapsed during an FA Cup match between his then team Bolton Wanderers and Tottenham Hotspur. He was diagnosed as having suffered a heart attack and was pronounced clinically dead.

Later asked if he could recall any impression of what had occurred, Muamba said he had felt a surreal dizziness, as though he was running alongside another person’s body. Perhaps surprisingly, he did not mention any pain. His experience could be interpreted as an out-of-body

experience (see **FT307:16-17, 323:40-42**), but is perhaps too vague to be of much use; clearer recollections have been recorded by others pronounced dead.

In 2000, Sam Parnia, a medical researcher, interviewed 63 patients who had survived heart attacks at Southampton General Hospital. Of those 63, seven were able to recall thoughts from the time they were unconscious. These included coming to a border or point of no return, feelings of peace, and in one instance the impression of jumping off a mountain.

An extension of the study encompassing several European and US hospitals employed wooden boards painted with writing and symbols on their upper surfaces, which were then hung from hospital ceilings, the idea being that only patients having a genuine out-of-body experience would be able to see what was on the board. Although two patients recalled looking down at their bodies, neither had been resuscitated in an area of their hospital having one of the hanging boards.

Whilst the results of Parnia’s study were inconclusive, it may suggest that some patients undergoing (near) death by heart attack do not suffer pain, either experiencing nothing at all, or a vaguely pleasant and slightly mystical state. But there is only one way to truly know... *Guardian*, 2 Mar 2015; *sciencealert.com*, 8 Mar 2017; *W.Daily Press*, 25 Mar; *D.Mail, Sun*, 6 Dec 2019. For more resurrections, see: **FT131:8, 143:10, 151:22, 254:9, 323:26, 334:10-11, 340:20, 381:21, 386:21.**

SIDELINES...

WHAT A WHOPPER!

A tooth extracted from Croatian Mijo Vodopija in Mainz, Germany, in 2018, has been verified by *Guinness World Records* as the world’s longest. It is 3.72cm (1.46in) long, half a millimetre longer than the previous record holder in India. *Sun*, 31 Oct 2019.

COWS ZAPPED

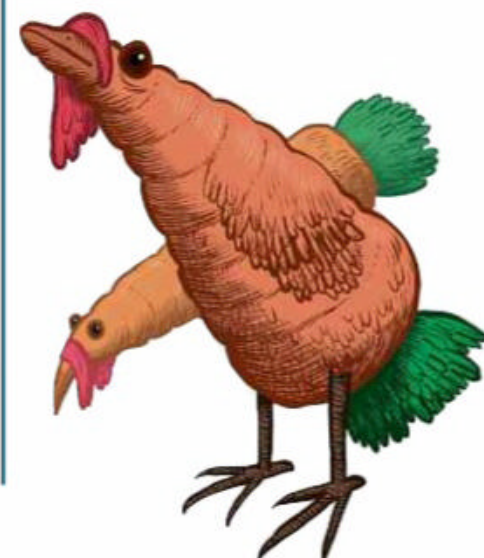
A group of French cattle farmers planned to sue the state over the deaths of hundreds of cows, thought to be victims of electromagnetic fields. Local vets were unable to explain the deaths. Stéphane Le Béchec, 51, a Breton farmer, had lost 200 cows in three years and was closing his business. He identified several possible causes, including a transformer, mobile phone towers and wind farms. *D.Telegraph*, 27 April 2019.

MARSUPIAL ASSAULT

Joanna Mactier, 44, was on her regular Saturday morning jog through a pine plantation outside Melbourne on 13 July when an enormous rogue kangaroo knocked her out. When she regained consciousness the bouncer was gone. She was treated in hospital for cuts and bruises. (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, 14 July 2019.

CARNIVORE’S REVENGE

The world’s first ‘meat vegetable’ was announced by Jim Taylor of Arby’s fast food restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia – “or, as we call them, ‘megetables’... Our first megetable creation is the ‘marrot’, which is turkey disguised as a carrot... We have set up a Vegetarian Support telephone hotline, and invite vegetarians to call and listen to the sound of sizzling bacon.” *Forbes Magazine*, 12 Aug 2019.





SIDELINES...

YOU'RE NICKERED

Yuki Endo, 35, was arrested after breaking into the flat of a woman in Tokyo to steal her underwear. Police found 78 pairs of knickers at his home. "I only stole panties," he said in mitigation. "I have no interest in bras." *Sunday Mirror*, 6 Oct 2019.

SERPENT DROPS IN

A 10ft (3m) python fell through the ceiling of a spa, alarming guests in Foshan, China. Staff at the spa, which is part of a hotel, recalled spotting the serpent 10 years earlier, but didn't think to mention it at the time and, as it grew, the ceiling eventually collapsed under its weight. *Sunday Mirror*, 24 Nov 2019.

PREMATURE TREK

A camel, a cow and a donkey were found wandering along a road in Kansas in late November, a bit early for Christmas. Officials asked for help finding the owners of the "three friends travelling together (towards a Northern star)". *D.Mirror*, 23 Nov 2019.

GIVING HEAD

María del Carmen Merino, 61, from Cantabria, northern Spain, gave her neighbour a box of sex toys "for safekeeping", but was arrested after the neighbour noticed an awful smell on 28 September, coming from a decomposing head wrapped in plastic, identified as belonging to Jesús María Baranda, 67, del Carmen's partner of seven years, reported missing in February. Merino denied involvement. "Someone left Jesus's head on the doorstep and I kept it as it was the only memento I had of him," she told police. *Times*, 2 Oct 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

UP IN SMOKE

Exploding washing machines, air freshener disaster, and a tree that burnt from inside out



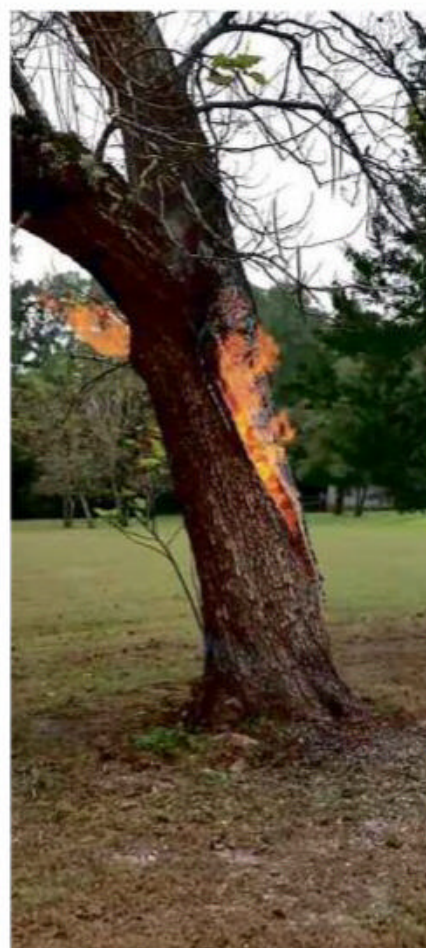
WEST YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

ABOVE: The explosion blew out windows and buckled doors. BELOW: The Texan tree that caught fire from the inside.

- A driver caused an explosion in his car after lighting a cigarette which ignited air freshener he had earlier sprayed in "excessive" amounts, according to firefighters. Gas from the aerosol spray ignited, blew out the windscreen and windows, and buckled the doors. The motorist, stuck in traffic in Halifax, West Yorkshire, escaped with minor injuries. The explosion was so powerful it caused damage to the windows of nearby businesses. Similar accidents occurred to two separate motorists, in Southend, Essex, and Conisborough, West Yorkshire, both in the same week of August 2017. *BBC News*, 7 Sept 2017; 16 Dec 2018.

- Meanwhile, there is increasing concern about exploding ovens in the UK. A mother of two was left shocked after her oven blew up during self-cleaning mode, showering her kitchen with broken glass. The oven is manufactured by Whirlpool but sold under the Ikea name. More recently, a Leicestershire woman, using the same model and the same

He had esprayed air freshener in "excessive" amounts

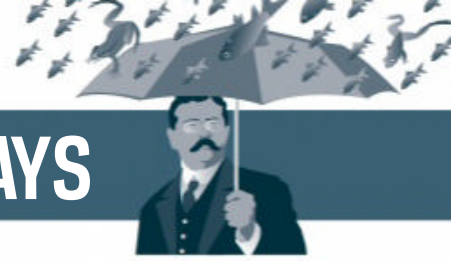


cleaning function, saw 400°C (752°F) glass from the shattered oven fly across her kitchen. A newspaper investigation claims over 70 ovens of various major brands have exploded in recent years, including a Whirlpool that detonated "like a bomb". The self-clean function heats the oven to 500°C (932°F) in order to burn food residue and grease to ashes.

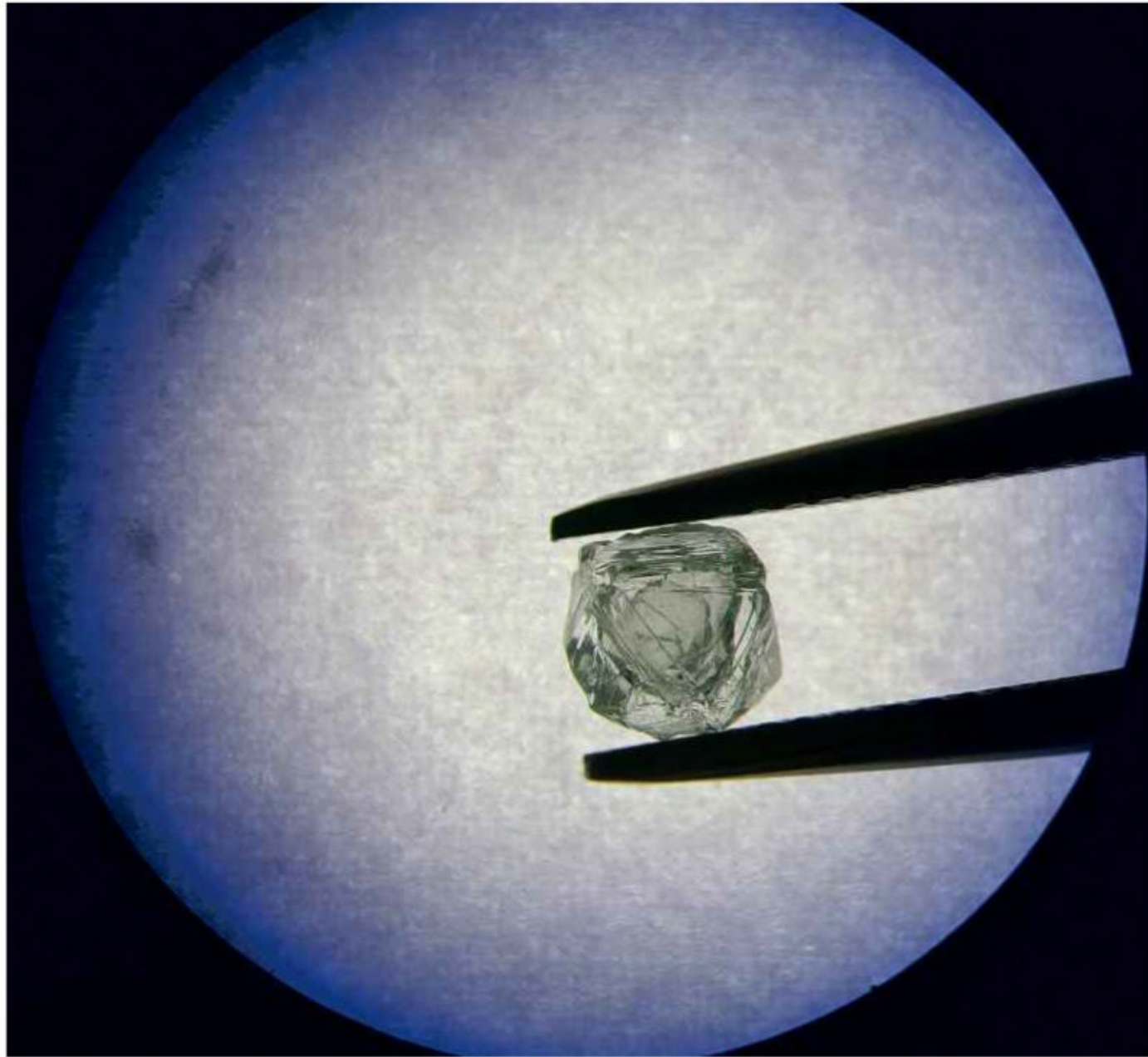
The Whirlpool manufacturer has been criticised by MPs for issuing gagging orders to silence victims of its faulty tumble driers, around 750 of which have caused household fires over the last 15 years. *D.Mail*, 30 Nov 2019.

- During a thunderstorm over Trinity, Texas, a tree was struck by lightning and caught fire, the flames billowing out from inside the trunk. The spectacle was filmed by 44-year-old local businessman Glenn Ratcliff, who uploaded it to social media, where it quickly reached over one million views. Mr Ratcliff said "We had no wind that day and fortunately no trees around it caught fire." *Times*, 23 Oct 2019.

GLENN RATCLIFF / CATERS NEWS



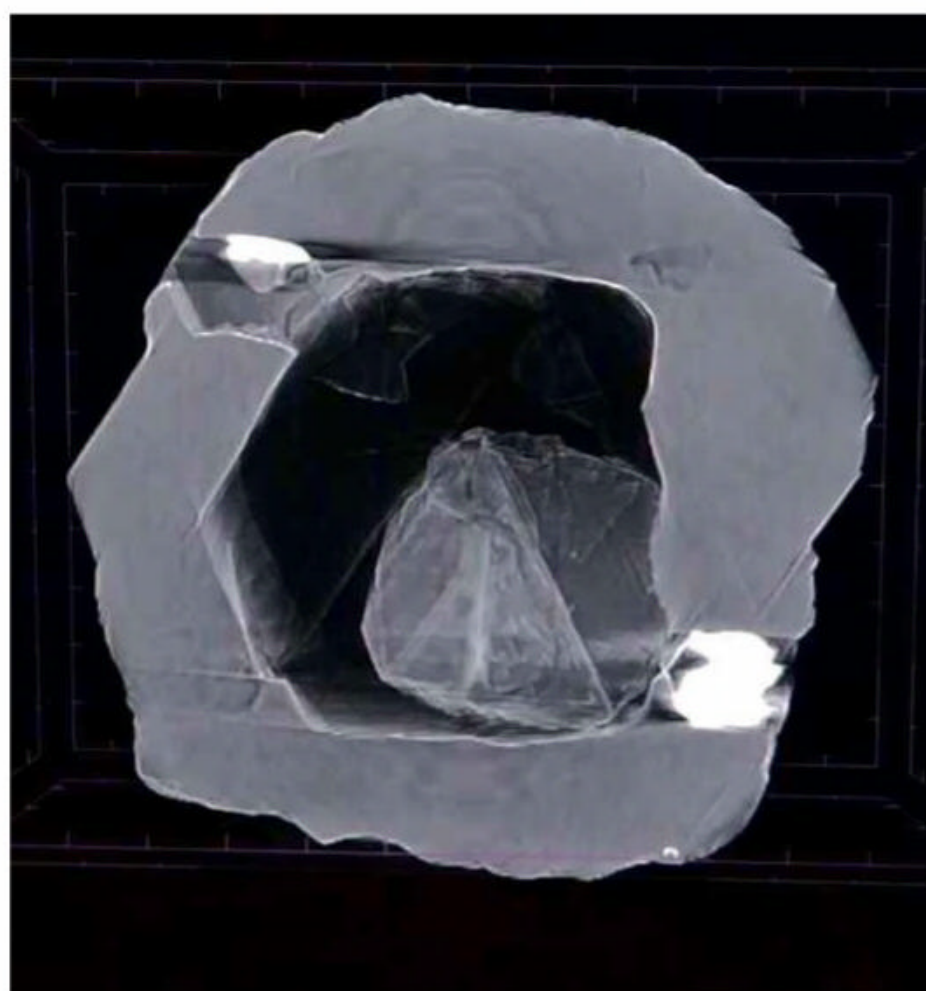
RUSSIAN DOLL DIAMOND | Lucky miner finds gem in a gem



PHOTOS COURTESY ALROSA

ABOVE: A small diamond is clearly visible within the larger gem. BELOW: An X-ray view of the unique 'Matryoshka' diamond.

Russian diamond miner Alrosa has found something unique: a small diamond with another gem moving freely inside it, resembling a traditional Russian Matryoshka doll. The precious stone, found at Alrosa's Nyurba site in Siberia, weighs just 0.62 carat, with an internal cavity of six cubic millimetres holding another diamond of just 0.02 carat. It is the first diamond of that nature ever found and may be more than 800 million years old. Alrosa planned to send it to the Gemological Institute of America for further analysis. Alrosa has also made other rare finds in recent years. In August, it announced plans to sell a 14.83 carat pink gem, named the Spirit of the Rose, that was expected to fetch one of the highest prices ever for a diamond. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 Oct 2019.



SIDELINES...

NOVEL EXCUSE

Accused of groping a female colleague, Dr Colin Gelder, 59, told a tribunal that he squeezed the nurse's bottom on a hospital ward in Coventry after fumes from a valerian spray he used to pacify his dogs during thunderstorms reacted with his hay fever medication, which made him feel "like Superman". *D.Telegraph*, 16 Oct 2019.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

Last May, a 3ft (90cm) stainless steel rabbit created by Jeff Koons in 1986 sold at Christie's in New York for £71 million. This made Koons the highest-priced living artist, overtaking the £70 million paid the previous November for David Hockney's 1972 work, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool With Two Figures)*. *D.Telegraph*, 17 May 2019.

STUCK FIVE DAYS

A man in his 60s, decorating his bathroom in Mattaincourt near Épinal, eastern France, slipped and got his head stuck in his stepladder... for five days. He was still conscious when medics turned up, having been alerted by his sister, who visited him on 23 August. His head, trapped between two rungs, swelled during the ordeal and he was unable to reach his phone. He was severely dehydrated. *BBC News*, 26 Aug 2019.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Christina Malone-Brown was born on 9/11 (11 September) at 9.11pm, weighing 9lb 11oz in Germantown, Tennessee, to Cametrione Malone and Justin Brown, as the US marked the anniversary of the Twin Towers attack. *Sunday People*, 15 Sept 2019.

CREDULITY REWARDED

Devastated when his wife left him in August 2017, a man from Omsk in Siberia, named only as M.E.A., called a number from a TV ad and was told his wife could be made to return using "magic knowledge". He paid £3,300 to a company called The Sixth Sense, but his wife didn't return – so the Kuybyshevsky Court in Omsk awarded him £5,100 in compensation. *BBC News*, 26 July 2019.



SIDELINES...

IMPERIAL TREASURES

On 8 November an 8in (20cm) yellow vase, bought for £1 at a Hertfordshire charity shop, sold for £484,000 at auction in Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. From the Qing dynasty, it bore the stamp of the Qianlong Emperor (reigned 1735-1796). Three days later, a pear-shaped teapot, 5in (13cm) tall, fetched £1,040,000 at auction in Dorchester. This too bore the stamp of the Qianlong Emperor. *Mail on Sunday, 10 Nov; D.Mail, 13+14 Nov 2019.*

JESUS SAVES

Tyler Moon, 25, had "Jesus saves" printed on his running bib when he took part in a 10-mile race in Minneapolis. When he collapsed with an irregular heartbeat at the eight-mile mark, a nurse anaesthetist named Jesus Bueno running behind him performed CPR and saved his life. *D.Mirror, 26 Oct 2019.*

MUSHROOM MONSTER

Walking in a forest near Santa Lucia de Gordon in northern Spain, a chef found what could be the world's biggest mushroom, weighing 152lb (69kg). Sergio Martinez Valledor decided to pick the monster *Meripilus giganteus*, but needed several friends to help him. They had to split it in two and drag the pieces to their vehicle. The previous record weight was 53lb (24kg). *Sun, 2 Nov 2019.*

FALSE ALARM

A man reported lying dead in the street turned out to be "taking a nap" and walked home after police were called to the scene in Gloucester. *Sun, 26 Sept 2019.*

RUPERT RETURNS

Steven Herring bought a 1964 Rupert Bear annual at a jumble sale in Barking in the early 1980s. Rediscovering it recently during a clear-out at his home in Hemingford Grey, Cambridgeshire, where he has lived since 2007, he noticed it was signed by his local vicar. Mr Herring, 66, and his wife, Esther Harrod, 67, were married by the Reverend Peter Cunliffe in 2015. Mr Cunliffe wrote his name in the book in 1964 when he was 10 and living in Letchworth. *BBC News, 20 Nov 2019.*

SOME SEASONAL STOWAWAYS



OWL IN A CHRISTMAS TREE

The Newman family from the US state of Georgia were decorating their Christmas tree when they were surprised to find a small owl roosting among the baubles and branches. Katie McBride Newman told CNN that her daughter India, 10, was the first to spot the stowaway bird one evening after dinner. "She comes very dramatically into the dining room and goes, 'Mama, that ornament scared me'", said the mother of two. "Then she bursts into tears". Ms Newman, an owl enthusiast, had placed several owl decorations in the large, 10ft (3m) tree, so she assumed one of these had alarmed her daughter. However, upon checking, she realised it was an actual owl when it swivelled its head round to look at her as she approached.

The family opened windows in efforts to encourage the bird to depart, but next morning it was still perched in the fir. Eventually, staff from a local wildlife centre were able to capture the owl, which they identified as an Eastern screech owl, common in Georgia. They remarked that the bird was quite thin, suggesting it may have been hiding in the fir tree since the family bought it back in November. After checking for injuries and feeding it, the family waited until dark when they took the owl into a nearby forest and released it.

Regular updates about the strigine saga were posted on Mrs Newman's Facebook page, with the owl and its host family gaining a loyal following on social media. A final Facebook post bore Mrs Newman's tribute to the Christmas owl: "Thank you for the honor you bestowed on our family – for making the magic & mystery of Advent come alive in our home, and for inspiring connection among all who followed the adventure. God's peace to you as you make your new home outside our home. We hope to see you again. . . And to all a good night". *independent.co.uk, 20 Dec 2019.*

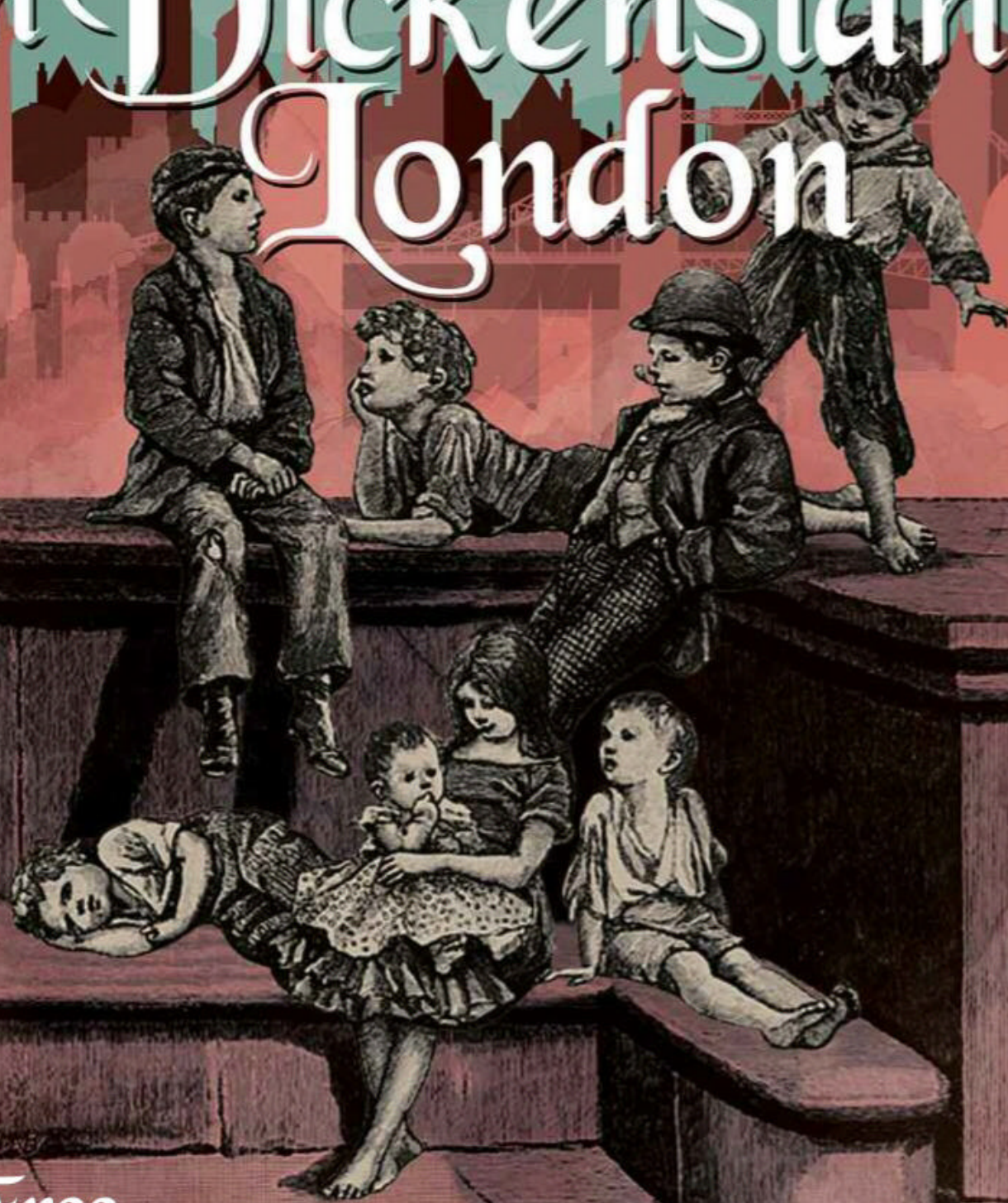


FESTIVE PYTHON

In December 2019, Queensland resident and British ex-pat Leanne Chapman found a 10ft (3m) python adorning her Christmas tree, on the balcony of her Brisbane apartment. The snake stayed in the tree for around five hours before slithering off. "It was a bit of a shock to begin with," she said. "You don't really expect to see a snake in your Christmas tree" – but after their initial surprise, Ms Chapman and her partner let the scaly reptile stay there until it departed around 10.30pm. "It was actually quite nice to see it that close up", she said, "because I've never seen anything like it before". *7news.com.au, upi.com, 13 Dec 2019.*

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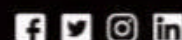
"In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice."

- Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*



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Life on Mars?

DAVID HAMBLING asks whether we discovered life on the Red Planet in 1973 without realising it

We may already have found life on Mars. We just failed to realise it.

In July 1976, two NASA Viking probes landed on Mars, on a mission to discover life on the Red Planet. More than 40 years later, Gilbert Levin still believes that mission was a success. This is remarkable because Levin is not an obscure character on the scientific fringe, but the NASA scientist who designed one of the crucial life-detection experiments in the first place.

Levin's experiment was based on a technique called 'labelled release'. A sample of Martian soil was mixed with a drop of nutrient solution. The nutrients had been 'labelled' by substituting radioactive carbon-14 for normal carbon. If there were any bacteria in the Martian soil, they would metabolise the nutrients and produce carbon dioxide containing the special carbon-14.

To the experimenter's surprise, the experiment immediately produced a steady stream of radioactive carbon dioxide. The same experiment was carried out by both landers with the same result. A positive test for life should have signalled time to uncork the champagne, but any chance of celebration was quickly extinguished by bad news from the other two experiments.

The pyrolytic release experiment tested for organisms which, like plants, turn carbon dioxide into carbohydrate. This found no sign of activity. The gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer, or Viking Molecular Analysis Experiment, could identify the smallest traces of organic molecules, picking up even a few parts per billion. But there was less carbon in Martian soil even than in the lifeless Moon rocks brought back by Apollo astronauts.

While Levin was ready to declare success, his colleagues reached a different conclusion. To them, the only explanation that made sense was that some non-biological process was responsible for the positive result in the labelled release experiment. A powerful, unexpected oxidising agent in the Martian soil might account for the carbon dioxide. Further, when the experiment was repeated a week later, it came back negative on both landers.

Later, scientists theorised that the result was due to conditions on the Martian surface. Mars has a thin atmosphere compared to Earth, and no ozone layer, but it is further from the Sun. As a result, the overall level of ultraviolet light is similar to Earth's, but it is concentrated at the short-



"Life on Mars seemed a long shot. But it would take a near miracle for Mars to be sterile"

wavelength, damaging end of the spectrum. Anyone living on Mars is going to need serious sunblock; more importantly for the scientists, this intense UV turns compounds in exposed soil into oxidisers. The 2008 Phoenix mission discovered the presence of perchlorates, oxidising chlorine compounds, in Martian soil. That seemed to settle the matter. The labelled release result was a false positive. There was no life on Mars.

Gilbert Levin, however, has always remained convinced that the positive result from his experiment was valid. And he has increasingly good reason to believe in it. "Life on Mars seemed a long shot," Levin wrote in *Scientific American* in October 2019. "On the other hand, it would take a near miracle for Mars to be sterile."

This is because Earth and Mars have been, as Levin puts it, 'swapping spit' for millions of years. Whenever a large meteorite hits one of the planets, it throws up a significant amount of material into space, known as ejecta. A tiny amount of Earth ejecta ends up on Mars – and vice versa. The Viking mission allowed scientists to examine the isotope ratios in Martian rocks so that they could be uniquely identified. By 2000 a type of meteorite known as SNC was confirmed as having originated from Mars. By 2019 over 200 meteorites found on Earth had been confirmed as being Martian. A similar amount of terrestrial material is likely to

have gone the other way. Soil typically contains about a billion bacteria per gram, giving a good chance of cross-planetary contamination by microbes.

Meanwhile, mathematical analysis of the labelled release experiment data by a team at the University of Southern California suggested that it did have the signature of life. "All the biological experiments from Earth sorted with the active experiments from Viking, and all the nonbiological data series sorted with the control experiments," said biologist Joseph Miller. "It was an extremely clear-cut phenomenon."

This sort of statistical data is suggestive, but not conclusive, like the other factors Levin cites which have emerged since the Viking experiment. These include evidence of ice, methane in the Martian atmosphere, and spectral analyses from Viking showing Martian rocks with patches that correspond to Earth lichens. Fortean will also be pleased to learn that he mentions as evidence of life "ghost-like moving lights, resembling will-o'-the-wisps on Earth that are formed by spontaneous ignition of methane." Earth's will o' the wisp is a complicated and controversial phenomenon in its own right (see **FT370:14**).

Levin's main complaint is that there has been no follow-up to his experiment. While subsequent missions have carried out a variety of tests, nobody has tried to replicate the labelled-release results, nor have they taken the direct approach of using a microscope to look for the soil bacteria that it implied existed.

NASA's current Mars rover, Curiosity, has been there since 2012. It has some impressive sensors, but nothing corresponding to the Viking lander experiments. NASA's forthcoming 2020 mission will carry tools to drill into the ground and inspect rocks for signs of minerals such as hydrated silica that, on Earth, are only produced by living things. Other instruments will give new insights on the geology and climate of Mars. Essentially the 2020 lander might find fossils, but it could drill right past life without ever seeing it.

Levin's frustration is understandable. He may very well be wrong, and there may be other explanations for the 1973 result. But if he is right, we discovered life on Mars 46 years ago and have failed to follow up on the important scientific discovery of the century. The Martians must be wondering if we are ignoring them deliberately.

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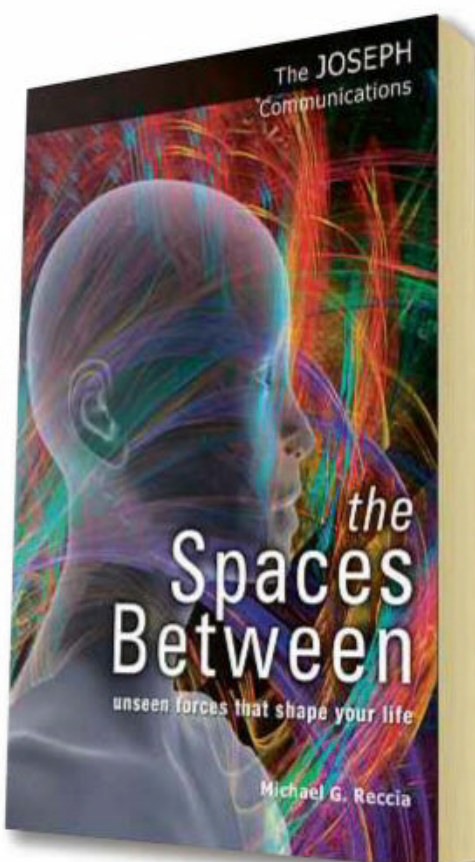
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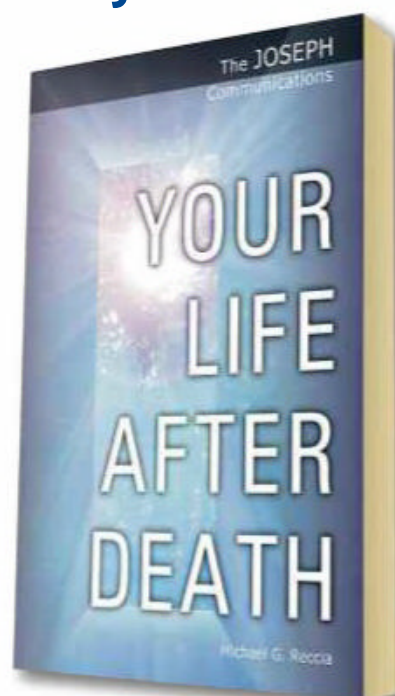
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PAUL SIEVEKING reports on two discoveries which push back the dates for the earliest visual art

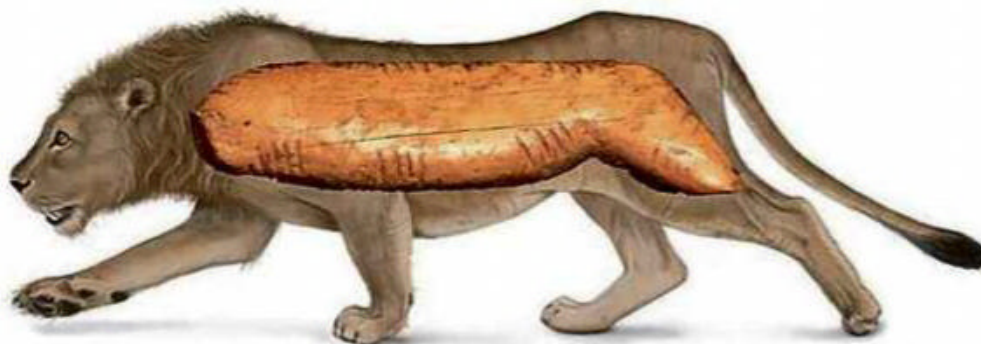
THE DAWN OF ART

Last summer, archaeologists from Novosibirsk Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, excavating the Denisova cave in the Altai Mountains, discovered the figurine of a cave lion (*Panthera spelæa*) – 42mm long, 8mm thick and 11mm high – made from a woolly mammoth tusk by an Upper Palaeolithic artist between 40,000 and 45,000 years ago. It was found inside the 11th layer of the southern gallery.

The precise age is yet to be confirmed, but the cautious dating means that this might be the oldest animal figurine in the world. The lion's head is missing; what we see is its hind legs, groin, back and belly, covered in an ornament of 18 rows of notches. There are two extra rows with four notches on the lion's right side. "The figurine depicts an animal with its tummy tucked in, its hind legs bent," said Mikhail Shunkov, head of the Institute's Stone Age Archaeology Department. "It is either galloping, jumping or getting ready to jump. The animal is shown in a typical big cat position for the moment when they are ready to catch a prey."

The archaeologists believe it is "too simplistic" to assume the figurine was a toy, but there is no evidence that it was a cult item. The mammoth ivory had to be carried for at least 60 miles (100km) from the northern slopes of the Altai Mountains. Traces of red ochre, mostly around the stomach area, suggest the whole figurine was once painted red. In 2018 a 'pencil' and a marble stone with traces of ochre powder were discovered in the same area. The assumption is that the artist was a Denisovan, but as Prof Shunkov pointed out, *Homo sapiens* was already wondering around Siberia 45,000 years ago, so they might well have influenced the Denisovans. The figurine doesn't resemble any previous find; the closest in style are cave lion figurines from Vogerfelt Cave in south-west Germany, and from caves in south-west France.

The Denisova Cave lies right at the border of the Altai region and the Altai Republic in south-western Siberia. Locals call it Ayu Tash, which means Bear Rock. It is relatively small with a floor area of about 270m² (2,900ft²). It has three galleries – the cosy Central Chamber with high, arched ceiling and a hole that lets in natural light, the South Gallery and the East Gallery. Nicely positioned above the Anuy River, the cave first caught the attention of Soviet scientists in the 1970s when they found palæo-archaeological remains. In 2008

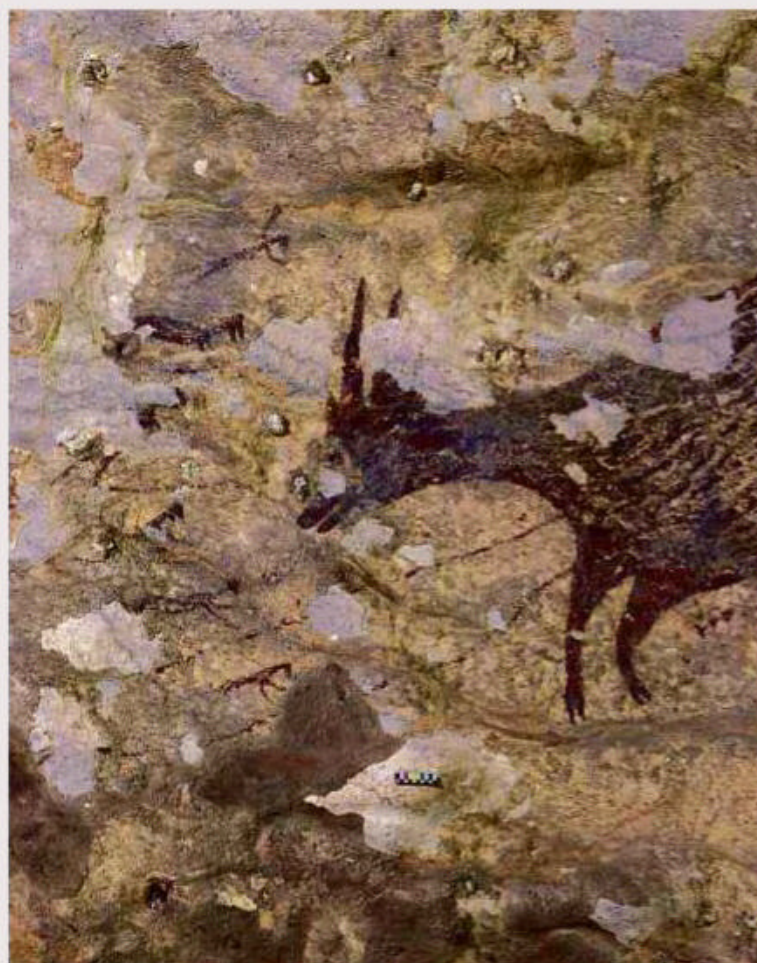


LEFT: The lion figurine discovered in the Denisova cave, Siberia. BELOW: 40,000-year-old cave art from Sulawesi, Indonesia.

an animal made at least 40,000 years ago was discovered in Borneo [FT376:14]. Previously, images of this level of sophistication date to about 20,000 years ago, with the oldest cave paintings believed

to be more basic creations such as handprints.

The Sulawesi cave (known as Leang Bulu'Sipong 4) is in a well-explored system, which researchers had visited frequently over the past decade. The hunting scene was discovered in 2017 after an expedition member noticed what appeared to be an entrance to a high-level chamber above and climbed up a fig tree to investigate. The 4.5m (15ft)-wide panel shows six fleeing mammals – two Sulawesi warty pigs and four dwarf buffaloes, known as anoas, small but fierce animals that still inhabit the island's dwindling forests. The animals are being pursued by therianthropes (human-like figures with some animal features), who seem to be wielding long swords or ropes. Their bodies are human-shaped, but one appears to have the head of a bird and another has a tail. Human-animal hybrids occur in the folklore of almost every modern society and are frequently cast as gods, spirits or ancestral beings in religions across



Siberian archaeologists discovered a tiny finger bone fragment of 'X woman', a juvenile female believed to have lived around 41,000 years ago [FT262:22]. Analysis showed she was genetically distinct from thick-browed Neanderthals and modern humans. The recent addition to the human family tree was christened Denisovan. Further research showed that the Denisovans were a sister group of Neanderthals. The two groups split from a common ancestor around 390,000 years ago. *siberiantimes.com*, 20 Nov 2019.

● A hunting scene painted on a cave wall on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi has been dated to nearly 44,000 years old, making it the earliest known figurative cave art by our species. It is nearly twice as old as any previous hunting scene and provides unprecedented insights into the earliest storytelling and the emergence of modern human cognition. Last year, a cave painting of

the world. An ivory figurine of a lion-headed human – found in the Hohlenstein-Stadel Cave in the Swabian Jura in Germany in 1939 and dating from 35,000 to 40,000 years ago [pictured FT361:14] – was, until now, thought to be the earliest depiction of a therianthrope.

Some researchers have questioned whether the panel represents a single story, suggesting it could be a series of images painted over a longer period. Rock art is difficult to date, and the scientists relied on analysing mineral growths, known as cave popcorn, that had formed over the painting [FT321:18]. Measuring the radioactive decay of uranium and other elements in the deposits gave dates ranging from 35,100 to 43,900 years as a minimum age for the Sulawesi panel, the earliest date relating to one of the warty pig drawings. The findings are described in the journal *Nature*. *theguardian.com*, 11 Dec; *BBC News*, *D.Telegraph*, 12 Dec 2019.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

245: TUT TUT

Thanks to characteristic Canada Post ineptitude, I've only just received FT386 (October) and seen Maria J Pérez Cuevo's excellent Egyptian survey and the magazine's notice of Scott Creighton's *The Great Pyramid Hoax*. Herewith, some friendly amplifications, counting also as a Welcome Back to Tut's latest British excursion.

Hysteron Proteron (Last First – Wikipedia notice exemplifies from Virgil and the Koran). I was puzzled by the claim that only the royal cartouche is evidence for pharaoh Khufu building the Great Pyramid (I always thought it was Jack Hawkins in *Land of the Pharaohs*) c.2550BC.

Creighton (2017) argues – you can hear his podcast – that the cartouche was forged by Howard Vyse in 1837. Not a new notion; I'm staying neutral. Zecharia Sitchin had made the same claim back in 1980 – 'For Fame and Fortune'. Both are old hands at Egyptological fantasy. In two earlier books, *The Giza Prophecy* (2012) and *The Secret Chamber of Osiris* (2015), Creighton asserted that the pyramids were not tombs but 'recovery vaults' for storing evidences of Egyptian civilisation against forthcoming catastrophe. As for Sitchin, I doubt if many will be impressed by somebody who believes the pyramids were built by aliens from a mysterious 'Twelfth Planet' – getting near to David Icke territory here, also the more plausible idea in Star Trek's *Who Mourns for Adonis?* that aliens were glimpsed by ancient Greeks and taken to be gods.

For an effective demolition of Creighton's book, see the online review by Jason Colavito.

Herodotus in his Book Two on Egypt ascribes, with blistering criticism of his oppressive rule, the great pyramid to Cheops (Khufu). Now, this proves nothing in itself. Herodotus could not read hieroglyphics (what non-Egyptian could?), therefore relied on priests and dragomen – all modern tourists know of what local guides are capable. Even if untrue, it remains evidence of belief, which may count for something.

More to the point, the Egyptian priest Manetho (c. 300 BC), who presumably would know his pharaonic onions, also says Khufu (using his Hellenised name Suphis) built the thing.

Even more to the point, there are the papyrus documents discovered by French



archaeologists in 2013 in a cave (shades of the Dead Sea Scrolls) at Wadi al-Jarf on the Red Sea coast. These are the log-books of Merer, an official in charge of transporting stones from the Tura limestone quarry to Giza in the 27th year of Khufu's reign.

One section (there is an online translation) shows concern for the workers' living conditions. This may go a long way to vindicating Herodotus's much-ridiculed claim that the (now lost) hieroglyphics on the pyramid listed leeks, radishes, and other foodstuffs provided by Cheops for his workers; cf. my almost-as-ancient defensive 'How Credulous was Herodotus?' *Greece and Rome* 11 (1964), 167-77.

To Maria J Pérez Cuevo's detailed and delightful Egyptian coverage, I would add to the Bibliography Julie Hankey's *A Passion for Egypt: A Biography of Arthur Weigall* (2001). Arthur Edward Pearse Brome Weigall (1880-1934 – his name deserves a cartouche) was an English archaeologist-cum-designer-cum-journalist-cum-film critic-cum-prolific author. Having worked under the distinguished though demanding Flinders Petrie, he replaced Howard Carter as Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt, this giving him experience with and insight into the personalities and archaeological politickings of the major English and French excavators.

As *Daily Mail* correspondent, he witnessed the opening of Tut's tomb (1923), reportedly saying of Lord Carnarvon's jocular entrance into the tomb, "If he goes down in that spirit, I give him six weeks to live." Cue to the Curse. Fort (*Books*, pp678,701,884) makes three sceptical references to it. He includes the statistic that 14 people fell victim to the Curse. Pérez Cuevo says six, a figure

echoed on many websites, though some expand the death-toll to two dozen – yet more warning about the dangers of second-hand and Internet reporting. Pérez Nuevo makes the obvious point – I've made it myself elsewhere: Why did Howard Carter, opener/despoiler of the tomb, survive to 64, dying in 1939?

Scientific explanations for Carnarvon's death include toxins in the air and lethal bat-droppings. Saw plenty of those creatures when I 'despoiled' the great pyramid in 1963. Since this edifice also comports a Curse, I should perhaps count myself lucky to be alive – some CC readers may think themselves otherwise...

Weigall, who missed Tut's tomb by 50 yards in 1911, had much to say about the Curse, pointing to similar stories involving the heretic pharaoh Akhnaten (husband of ancient beauty Nefertiti – see the 1954 film *Sinuhe The Egyptian*), and for good measure read one of Michael Pearce's Mamur Zapt novels.

Nicely enough, British Museum Egyptologist Wallace Budge believed that Weigall's death (otherwise attributed to drugs and disease) "was the unfortunate victim of the curse of the failure and the hardships which he had wished for others".

There are many enticing titbits in Hankie's biography. For easy instances, Weigall's belief that, via Irish lineage, he himself was descended from the Pharaohs, and his discovery of modern Egyptian fellahin who still worshipped the god Amen – Hammer Films' *The Mummy* (1959) had a similar premise. His Nubian excavation reports emphasised the degree to which these people kept up the customs of ancient times. Alas, no possible confirmation of Herodotus's claim that various peoples in these regions ejaculated black spunk.

Weigall could be very peculiar, evinced in his biography of Roman emperor Nero (1930), in which he sought to cast such crimes as his matricide in a favourable light, albeit such modern writers as Massimo Fini's (in English translation) *Nero – 2000 Years of Lies* (1993) have gone down the same path.

Those who blame their old school for everything bad will point to Weigall's detestation of his own institution's regimen which included compulsory beer drinking at dinner and three rounds of boxing before breakfast – latter might have done Billy Bunter some good...

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANCIS FRITH, 1858. WELLCOME COLLECTION

'TWILIGHT CHILDREN' RESCUED

The strange and disturbing case of the Turpin family



ABOVE: The family dressed in matching outfits for pictures at a Las Vegas-style renewal of David and Louise Turpin's wedding vows, complete with an Elvis impersonator. **BELOW:** The deceptively normal looking Turpin family home in Perris, California,

Neighbours of David and Louise Turpin in the affluent southern Californian town of Perris, Riverside County, expressed shock and surprise when the devoutly Christian couple were found guilty of the systematic starvation and torture of all but one of their 13 home-schooled children in April 2019. Despite the Turpin family having lived in Perris, 70 miles (113km) south-east of Los Angeles, for nearly a decade, little was known about them until January 2018, when one of their daughters escaped from the family home by climbing out of a window. The 17-year-old girl, who had been plotting her escape for two years, called 911 to raise the alarm. She told emergency services that "two of my sisters and one of my brothers... they're chained up to their bed. Sometimes I wake up and I can't breathe because how dirty the house is [sic]".

The girl did not know her address, the year or month, nor the meaning of the word



"medication". Neither she nor any of her siblings had ever seen a dentist, and none had seen a doctor in four years. Police later discovered her emaciated brothers and sisters, aged between two and 29 at the time of the raid, living in filthy conditions amidst their own human waste. At least three, including a 22-year-old man and a 29-year-old woman, were shackled to their beds. It was later determined that the parents, David Turpin, 57, an engineer, earning \$140,000 a year for US defence contractors Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman, and his wife Louise,

50, described as a homemaker, had been keeping their children in squalor and administering various "punishments" for at least nine years. Hundreds of journals kept by the children were discovered and used as evidence at the subsequent trial. The children, whose names all begin with the letter 'J', were kept indoors except for Halloween and family trips to Disneyland or Las Vegas. They had no access to TV or radio.

In 2014, David Turpin had registered himself as head of the 'Sandcastle Day School', based at his home address. Three years earlier, he had

filed for bankruptcy with debts of \$500,000. Consultant psychiatrist David Canter has suggested that this may have been a factor: "Is it possible that, as the Turpins' finances cycled ever more out of control, they became increasingly coercive in their attempts to handle the situation they had created for themselves?"

The couple were sentenced to life imprisonment and are expected to spend the rest of their lives behind bars unless granted parole in 25 years' time. They wept as victim impact statements from four of their children were read to the court. "I cannot describe in words what we went through growing up", said one child. "Sometimes I still have nightmares of things that happened such as my siblings being chained up or getting beaten", but he concluded by saying "I love my parents and have forgiven them for a lot of things they did to us". Several others also forgave the parents. "I love my parents so much", said one girl. "Although it may not have been the best way of raising us, I am glad that they did because it made me the person I am today". Another, asking for leniency, said her parents had believed that "God had put in their hearts" to home-school them.

Not all the children were so forgiving. "My parents took my whole life from me", said one daughter, visibly shaking, "but now I'm taking my life back. I'm a fighter". Her statement also contained a suggestion that some of the children may have been brainwashed. "I saw my dad change my mom. They also changed me, but I realised what was happening".

David Turpin's lawyer read a statement on his client's behalf: "My home schooling and discipline had good intentions. I never intended for any harm to come to my children. I love my children and I believe they love



me". Amidst the squalor, dirt and human faeces, eight small desks, a blackboard, and alphabet and number posters were discovered in the living room. A former neighbour of the Turpins at a previous address in Rio Vista, Texas, described it as "waist-deep in filth". Ricky Vinyard, a tree feller, claimed "there were dead dogs and cats in there", further stating that "everything had locks on it: the closet, the toy chest, the refrigerator". He also recalled the house being full of religious material, "stuff like preparing for Armageddon. It looked like a cult house". Another former neighbour, Mike Clifford, 60, a machinist who had lived opposite the Turpins at Murrieta, California, remembers seeing the children being forced to walk in circles "like they were marching for hours at a time". Mr Clifford's wife recalls two of the girls speaking together in a monotone. She referred to them as "the clones".

Louise Turpin, who, according to a Riverside County sheriff's captain, had seemed "perplexed" at seeing police officers in her home at the time of the raid, told the court she was "truly sorry" and that she loved her children "so much", adding "I really look forward to the day I can see them, hug them and tell them I'm sorry". The couple, Elvis Presley fans, had renewed their marriage vows in Las Vegas with an Elvis impersonator on three occasions.

The court was told that the Turpins would buy apple or pumpkin pies and leave them within sight of their children but forbid them to eat any. Judge Bernard Schwarz berated the pair for their "selfish, cruel and inhuman treatment", telling them that the only reason their sentence was less than the absolute maximum allowed (life without parole) was that they had accepted responsibility for their crimes early on in the proceedings, thus sparing their children from "having to relive the humiliation and harm they endured in that house of horrors". The deeply religious couple told the court that they



ABOVE: A family photo with the children wearing Dr Seuss-inspired Thing 1, Thing 2 (and so on) T-shirts. BELOW: Louise and David Turpin appear in court.



believed God had called upon them to have this many children. Louise Turpin's brother Billy Lambert claims the pair were planning on having a 14th child so they could be the subjects of a reality TV show. He told reporters that his sister believed the public would be fascinated by their lives, and that they could make millions. This, Mr Lambert says, was their reason for moving to California – to be close to Hollywood.

Family photos show the children all dressed alike, the sons in black suits with red ties and the same pudding-bowl haircut as their father, the daughters all having long centre-parted hair and wearing the same pink plaid dresses. According to David Turpin's mother Betty, the parents dressed their children in identical clothes "for safety reasons".

Neighbours, who described the Turpins as extremely private, were shocked to learn that seven of the 13 children were adults;



their malnourished diet and lack of exercise had stunted their growth. Apparently the Turpins were known locally as "the vampire family" due to their pallor and the fact that they were only seen at night when they scavenged through neighbouring houses' bins. One neighbour, Andrew Santillan, denied knowing there were any children in the outwardly smart, terracotta-painted bungalow. Another, Wendy Martinez, who lived directly behind the Turpins, recalled seeing four of the children in 2017 kneeling on the front lawn, looking "very thin and very albino". When she tried talking with them they did not respond. They were "very afraid", she said, "like they had never seen people before".

The children would be made to sleep during the day (presumably to prevent them from being seen), becoming active for a few hours at night. Dubbed 'the twilight children' by journalists, they were only allowed to shower once a year

and were fed once a day. The parents also kept two Maltese dogs that appeared in better condition and better fed than the children. When rescued, all 13 were admitted to hospital with severe malnutrition and muscle wastage. The eldest, a 29-year-old woman, weighed just 70lb (32kg). The children were forced to memorise lengthy passages from the Bible, the parents administering frequent beatings and hog-tying their children with ropes as further punishment. After some learned how to escape, the Turpins began using chains and padlocks. Psychologists said that due to the abuse, some of the children were suffering from cognitive neuropathy, so that their mental ages were far lower than normal. The 17-year-old girl who raised the alarm, for example, has a reading age of seven.

Photographs circulated for public consumption on Facebook depicted an apparently happy family. But Louise Turpin's younger sister Elizabeth Jane Flores told journalists that she and other relatives had known something was wrong. However, their attempts to intervene had been rebuffed. Offers to visit were repeatedly rejected; she hadn't visited in 19 years, and the grandparents said they hadn't seen the children for five years. The Turpins kept their address a secret, and wouldn't allow relatives to speak to the children if they telephoned. David Turpin's mother Betty said her son was "a very good man", despite not having been allowed to see her grandchildren for so long, adding: "He is very protective of the kids". Ivan Trahan, another of the Turpin's neighbours, described them as "a very nice couple". Around 20 people across the USA, including nurses and psychologists, have offered to care for them. *independent.co.uk*, 16 Jan; *D.Mail*, 17 Jan; *Metro*, 17+26 Jan; *E.Standard*, 16+17+19 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 17-19 Jan; *S.Mirror*, 21 Oct 2018; *BBC News*, 19+20+22 April 2019. For some earlier family imprisonments, see **FT37:51-55**.



Whistling past the graveyard

Should we expect to find ghosts in cemeteries? Or even vampires? **ALAN MURDIE** investigates



ABOVE: A view of the Wadi-us-Salaam ('Valley of Peace') in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, reveals the vast scale of this reputedly haunted burial ground.

Part of the job of a serious writer on ghosts should be to quash exaggerated rumours and hysteria concerning alleged hauntings, seeking the truth rather than feeding sensation and fear. This is particularly so with claims of hauntings in burial grounds. The general view amongst serious ghost hunters in Britain is that cemeteries are largely *unhaunted*. Very few people have been known to die in graveyards and credible reports of paranormal phenomena are infrequent. This is despite cemeteries being visited by bereaved people recalling their deceased friends and relatives. In actuality, you are more likely to experience the ghost of a loved one in your home than any burial ground in which their remains lie.

As veteran investigator Andrew Green (1927-2004) often pointed out, because of the association made between graves and the ghostly in many people's minds, quite normal occurrences at burial sites, or within new buildings constructed upon them "are often assumed to be paranormal

phenomena". (*Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*, 1973, 2016). Pseudo-experiences may be generated by the existence of tombstones or other signs of burial, even if none has ever taken place.

Green cited a case concerning a family in Guildford. A man had cleared a churchyard in Abinger, Surrey, in 1968, and removed two lorry-loads of broken tombstones to construct a path in his own garden near Guildford some miles away. This was done quite effectively, but in 1970 the new owners of the property, although delighted with the general appearance of the path, became worried by the fact that the previous owner had laid the stones face uppermost, so that the fragments could be read. Being so disturbed by this they uprooted all the slabs, reversing them and then laying them back face down. One complete stone was deliberately broken into fragments as "no one would walk on it" because one young member of the household "had felt a presence whenever she was near the

stone". Green proposed a test whereby she would walk blindfolded along the path to see if she could locate the offending stone without seeing it, but this suggestion was not taken up.

Green stated: "The general attitude seemed incredible to me, for the stone in question had never been used: it was merely a spare waiting for a 'customer'. This provides a good illustration of the power that imagination can sometimes have." He also saw the potential for confusion if the site was ever excavated in the future considering "archaeologists may well be puzzled by finding what appears to be a 19th century graveyard in an area marked on the map as 'flood fields' and which has been the back gardens of property since 1961".

Green's own theory of ghost experiences was that they were generated by the unconscious mind, occasionally involving psi powers of the living, or accumulations of electromagnetic energy. So on this basis there was no reason to expect hauntings

in burial places. Set against this are the widespread and entrenched beliefs found in many cultures that regard cemeteries to be abodes of spirits. Such ideas have been current for thousands of years in the Middle East, dating back to the civilisations of Sumer, ancient Egypt and Babylonia. Contemporary examples can be found in reports emerging in September 2019 from Wadi-us-Salaam, the largest cemetery in the world, situated at Najaf, Iraq. In Arabic, its name means ‘the field of peace’ but for some of its gravediggers, the dead are not resting quietly.

The scale of the cemetery is staggering. Its vastness can only really be comprehended from the air. First used for burials more than 1,200 years ago, the number of graves is not known exactly, with estimates suggesting up to five million, the numbers swollen over the last 40 years by warfare and insurgency in the country.

As reported by *Al-Jazeera*, complaints are coming from cemetery workers reporting attacks by supernatural beings. Some locals attribute these to a solid apparition, variously known as ‘Tantal’, ‘Bzebza’, or ‘Gheria’. Hani Al Ghnaim, a 61-year-old gravedigger who has worked there for 11 years, claims there are two entities, one living and one dead. He believes the ghost appears in different guises, including a worm, a child and “a cat in a large fur coat” – and feeds on corpses. Venturing into the cemetery at night, Mr Al Ghnaim arms himself with a pick for protection. If he encounters an apparition he screams to drive it off.

Some gravediggers have quit entirely. Others report suffering physical assaults by corpses being buried. One employee, Murtaza Jwad Abo Sebi, aged 23, recalled: “It happened at night while I was working down in a grave to put a dead woman in her tomb during the funeral ceremony. When I bent down, her hand slapped my face so fiercely that I was left petrified.” Despite his puzzlement as to how the dead body, wrapped in a shroud could lash out, he received a severe shock and underwent a lasting traumatic reaction. He attempted suicide and underwent a course of treatment and psychotherapy at the American University Hospital in Beirut, Lebanon. He is now happily recovered and married.

Less fortunate was another victim, Haider al-Hatemi. He believes he was struck in December 2016 by a ghost “resembling a shadow”, that “sneaked up behind me and hit my head violently, leaving me badly injured.” Whatever occurred, there has been a disturbing aftermath. Now unable to walk straight, he believes a spirit has possessed his body for more than two years. Despite costly shamanic healing sessions, Mr al-Hatemi remains ill and his wife is divorcing



A ghost “sneaked up behind me and and hit my head violently, leaving me shaken”

him because of his behaviour.

According to Ameer Al Juboury, 23, who manages the gravediggers unit, ghosts are walking because their burial plots are being illegally sold by family members on the black market. Presumably these spirits are angry over being denied their rightful graves, a resting place in the cemetery being much coveted by many of the Shia faithful, or their remains have been disinterred by usurpers.

Alternatively, when interviewed about these stories, Sajida Jalazai, Assistant Professor of Religion at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, tentatively identified these entities as specimens of ‘ghuls’ from a “class of djinn that dine on the flesh of the living and dead humans” that haunt cemeteries. (Source: ‘Gravediggers claim ghosts haunt world’s largest cemetery’ *Al-Jazeera*, 10 Sep 2019).

From a rationalist viewpoint, it is not unknown for professionals dealing with the dead to become emotionally affected by their work environment. Several archaeologists and museum curators have

LEFT: The Hammersmith Ghost caused a cemetery scare – and a fatal shooting – in early 19th century London.

told me how they became unsettled by uncovering human remains, or from working in stores containing hundreds of collected bone shards. With so many staff at the colossal site, workers at Wadi-Al-Salaam might well include a small proportion of employees especially sensitive or susceptible to such conditions, suffering anxiety attacks or even hallucinatory experiences. Without more background information and further investigation, it is impossible to reach any conclusive verdict on the meaning and significance of these experiences.

What can be said is that Western apparitional encounters in cemeteries – rare to begin with – seldom display any corporeal element. Although poltergeist manifestations are defined by physical effects, any alleged entities are domestic, intangible and invisible, with little evidence that they “invade the tomb”. (See ‘Do Poltergeists Invade the Tomb?’ in *Ghosts and Poltergeists*, 1953, by Herbert Thurston).

Occasionally, British cemeteries have been the focus for panics and scares prompting mass ghost hunts for seemingly material entities. The Hammersmith ghost of 1803-04 was a suicide interred in the graveyard, considered sufficiently physical for an off-duty customs officer to shoot at it, with fatal results for a living man, a plasterer wearing white overalls mistaken as the apparition. (See *A Natural History Ghosts*, 2012, by Roger Clarke; ‘The Hammersmith Ghost’ by Alan Murdie in *Justice of the Peace*, 2003, v.167, pp. 975-77; also **FT296:42-45, 310:34-35.**)

In the 20th century a hunt for ‘a vampire with iron teeth’ blew up at a Glasgow community graveyard on the evening of 11 September 1954. The graveyard filled with young children armed with stakes and knives, searching out a vampire claimed to have slain two infants (see **FT294:48**). Attempts by a policeman to move the children on failed and the group hunted for the vampire for hours, only going home when it started to rain. Over the next two evenings gangs of children returned, but the hunt petered out. No children were prosecuted as all participants fell below the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland. (Furthermore, as later observed at Highgate Cemetery in similar incidents occurring in 1970-74, it is not technically a crime to hunt vampires).

Folklorists have puzzled over the significance of the solid “vampire with iron teeth”. Though superficially having a resonance with the ancient Middle East,



GHOSTWATCH

MAGNUS HAGDORN / CREATIVE COMMONS

suggestions of childish inspiration from a verse in the Book of Daniel 7:7 (“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth”) seem improbable. Blamed more widely were the invidious effects of ghoulish juvenile horror comics imported from America. A campaign composed of an unlikely alliance of Christians, communists and the National Union of Teachers blamed this frisson-inducing literature for corrupting Glaswegian children, sparking a campaign to ban horror comics, a cause taken up by Alice Cullen, MP for the Gorbals. This resulted in Parliament enacting the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1955.

Beyond these and other examples, traditions of aggressive physical revenants in Western Europe belong to the Middle Ages before insensibly vanishing away (although in the Orthodox Christian lands of the East fears persisted much longer). Perhaps it was trauma of the Black Death of 1347-51 that finished this kind of story in Britain. Aside from a few folkloric fragments from the Hebrides, and real cases of premature burial of persons still living or botched executions where prisoners revived, supposedly true stories of walking corpses are notable by their absence. The massive expansion in the use of cremation has greatly reduced the scope for them today.

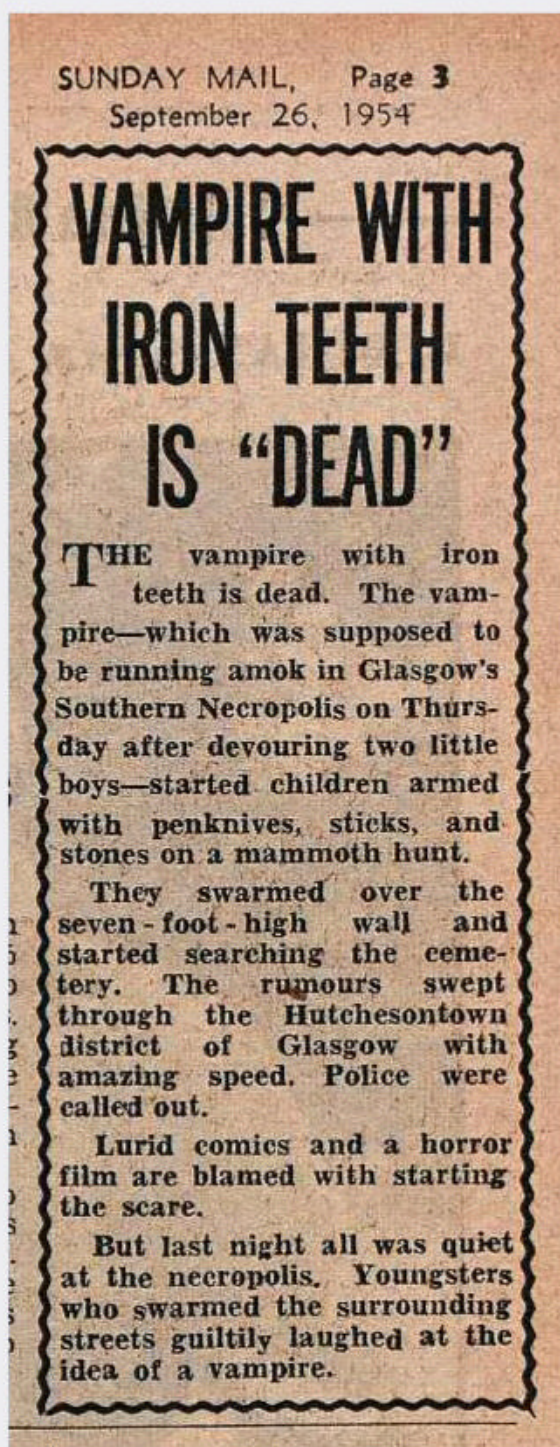
Outside folklore and fiction, stories featuring dead bodies rising to molest the living are relegated to feverish visions, drug-induced hallucinations and bad dreams. Nonetheless, such visions may have possible paranormal content on occasions.

For instance, a story entitled ‘The Corpse that Rose’ is recorded in *Lord Halifax’s Ghost Book* (1936). Its source was the Revd RA Kent, who recounted a nightmare suffered by his grandfather Reginald Easton around 1890, featuring a body climbing out of its coffin. Easton dreamed of staying at Breede Hall in Staffordshire and walking out to the church where a bell was tolling and a funeral cortege approaching. On enquiring as to the identity of the deceased, he was told it was his friend Monckton of Somerford Hall (misspelt ‘Summerford in the text). Moved by this news, he joined the service for the deceased. At its conclusion the old verger “of revolting aspect” approached him and said, “I understand you are Mr Monckton’s oldest friend. If this is so, will you lead the way to the vault after the service?”

Easton agreed and accompanied the pallbearers in taking the coffin down into the vault, descending several flights of steps to reach where it was to be laid. Looking around he saw “thirty to forty coffins of members of the family”, some



ABOVE: A mural painted by teenager Ella Bryson to commemorate the ‘Gorbals Vampire’ was unveiled in 2016. LEFT: The ‘vampire with iron teeth’ in the *Sunday Mail*, 26 September 1954.



of them half-broken through age and with skeletons spilling out. After the coffin was deposited, the verger suddenly rushed away up the stairs and slammed the vault door shut, trapping Easton inside. Easton screamed for help and after an hour heard cracking noises, which he initially interpreted as rescuers seeking to free him. To his horror he then realised it was the body of old Monckton, already in a state of decomposition, wrenching itself from the coffin. The re-animated body got out and tried to seize him. Easton dodged around the coffin to avoid its grasp. A ghastly pursuit began until Easton collapsed from exhaustion, whereupon the corpse sprang upon him and proceeded to sink its fingernails into his face. Easton awoke screaming at this point, and to his immense relief found the sun shining through the windows. But the next day he learned that Monckton had died, his horrific dream apparently coinciding with the death or providing a symbolic forewarning.

If cemeteries in Western societies are relatively unhaunted nowadays, ghost beliefs may still cluster about other dark entrances into the earth like caves or tunnels. Urban myths and contemporary superstitions can invest them with auspicious and frightful reputations. A good example of one such modern tradition involves the supposedly haunted Mount

Victoria Tunnel at Wellington, New Zealand, where it has become customary for motorists entering to sound their horns while passing through.

According to the *Guardian*: “Many residents believe a jaunty toot – or, for some, blasting their horns for the tunnel’s entire 623-metre length – either wards off evil spirits, or acknowledges the memory of a teenage girl.” The girl was Phyllis Symons, a 17-year-old murdered in 1931, whose body was discovered during the building of the tunnel. Her killer was a construction worker named George Errol Coats, 29, hanged on 17 December 1931.

Among tales that surfaced on-line in 2018, compounding the notion of troubled spirits, are assertions of the tunnel crossing the site of a cemetery for victims of a yellow fever epidemic. Headstones were moved to the side of the road, but mass graves were allegedly not relocated. Consequently, the Wellington tunnel story has acquired a life of its own, inspiring a fictional TV drama and also a novel published in August 2019.

Attempts to impose a ‘honking ban’ have so far been unsuccessful, amid concern for the welfare of pedestrians hazardizing to walk along a path through the tunnel. As in Iraq, making a noise is deemed a protective measure to drive away malign influences, the practice of relentlessly honking horns being described as “a city-wide superstition”. (*Guardian*, 31 Oct 2019; ‘*The dark reason we all toot in the Mt Victoria Tunnel*’ *Wellington Live*, 28 Jan 2018).

The *Guardian* seems somewhat astonished that, save for the most adolescent or superstitious, any New Zealanders of today would believe sounding car horns wards off malign spirits. Even when participants in a folk custom assert this reason, it should not be assumed that the belief is necessarily held and engaged. This is a point made by folklorist Bob Pegg in *Rites and Riots* (1981) regarding a claim made over the firing of a gun during the nocturnal ceremony of apple wassailing held in Somerset orchards in the 1950s. It is more likely this remark was derived from a vague understanding of once-fashionable antiquarian theories about folk customs being ‘survivals’ of ancient magical rites. More likely the discharge of a gun simply reflected an exuberant sense of fun, a celebratory letting off of steam, more than any motives of deterring evil spirits.

In fact, many people still adhere to protective spiritual techniques. As Judge



LEFT: The Victoria Tunnel, Wellington, New Zealand: should one honk or not?
BELOW: The murdered Phyllis Symons, whose body was found during the building of the tunnel.

Carol Atkinson observed in the High Court in 2015: “There is nothing unusual in such a belief. Many mainstream Christian faiths have their homes blessed by a priest before occupying. Other faiths have prayers written on paper rolled up into a container and nailed above the door to keep their home safe. The crucifix over the entry to the home. The blessing of a baby by practising Catholics before christening, lest anything untoward might happen. Crossing your fingers. In my judgment, these are all examples of the same thing.” (In *Re R (A child) (Fact-finding hearing)* [2015] Lexis Citation 153)

Also many people actually relish thoughts of a hair-raising encounter amongst the tombs, judging from comments by media presenter Paul O’Grady to daytime ITV show *This*

Morning with Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan, on 25 October 2019. He told his hosts “how much he has always been into the paranormal” and explaining that he loved going into tombs during his work with the show *Most Haunted*: “You run round in the dark screaming ‘cos, you know, it’s fun, and also, I’m curious as well... I’ve been in tombs and all sorts. I can’t tell you what they’ve done to me. Strapped to a bed in an old asylum in Venice.” (*Metro*, 25 Oct 2019.)

Keen though he is, I think it unlikely that Paul or even *Most Haunted* will venture into Wadi-Al-Salaam anytime soon. Meanwhile, Paul can console himself with his home being haunted by a number of ghostly smells. He and his partner Andre Portasio get a “waft of perfume” they attribute to an elderly woman haunting the property. “I went to dinner with somebody and one of the people at the dinner, they said to me, ‘My friend is the granddaughter of the lady that used to live in your house’ and she said, ‘Can you smell the perfume?’ – And I said ‘yeah’, but we’ve all smelt it. He identifies it as a fragrance called ‘Joy’. “It’s very heavy but no, it’s not scary”. A second olfactory manifestation at his home is “a whiff of home perm solution. You get this whiff of that ammonia. It takes me back to me mother years ago, sat there with a plastic cape on having her hair done.”

Of all forms of reported ghostly manifestations, phantom smells probably have least scope for engendering fear on the part of those encountering them.

The Wellington Tunnel story has acquired a life of its own, inspiring a TV drama and a novel





OLD FAKE NEWS

Alternative facts and dodgy dossiers have been with us for a very long time – at least since one Babylonian deity discovered ambiguity

A Cambridge academic believes he has discovered an early example of fake news, in the text of a 3,000-year-old Babylonian tale inscribed on a clay tablet from 700 BC. The Gilgamesh Flood myth (believed to have inspired the Old Testament account of Noah's Ark, in Genesis 6-9) was examined by Assyriologist Dr Martin Worthington, a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, who specialises in Babylonian, Assyrian and Sumerian grammar, literature and medicine. He says that nine lines of the text may be understood in very different ways.

The Babylonian deity Ea (a trickster god of water, knowledge and mischief) apparently promises a rain of food, but concealed within these lines are a warning of an apocalyptic flood to come. Dr Worthington argues that Ea was motivated by self-interest, and that he tricks humanity "by spreading fake news. He tells the Babylonian Noah, known as Uta-napishti, to promise his people that food will rain from the sky if they help him build the ark. What the people don't realise is that Ea's nine-line message is a trick: it is a sequence of sounds that can be understood in radically different ways, like English 'ice cream' and 'I scream'".

Contemplating the god's duplicity, Dr Worthington said: "He might want to retain deniability. If asked, 'Why didn't you warn the people?' he could say 'They decided to interpret it that way. That's nothing to do with me' [...] Once the ark is built, Uta-napishti and his family clamber aboard and survive with a menagerie of animals. Everyone else drowns. With this early episode, set in mythological time, the manipulation of information and language has begun. It may be the earliest ever example of fake news".

Dr Worthington's research focuses on nine lines which, he says, can be interpreted contrarily: "Ea's lines are a



ABOVE: The 3,000-year-old clay tablet containing the Gilgamesh Flood myth, which Dr Worthington believes contains nine lines that can be read in different ways.

verbal trick which can be understood in different ways which are phonetically identical. Besides the obvious positive reading promising food, I found multiple negative ones that warn of the impending catastrophe. Ea is clearly a master wordsmith who is able to compress multiple simultaneous meanings into one duplicitous utterance". In Babylonian, one line reads: "ina lilati usaznanakkunusi samut kibati", which translates as either "at dawn there will be kukku cakes" or "at dawn, he will rain down upon you darkness". Another can be translated as "he will rain down on you abundance", but also carries an alternative meaning "he will rain down on you abundantly".

But why would a god lie? Dr Worthington explained: "Babylonian gods only survive because people feed them. If humanity had been wiped out, the gods would have starved. The god Ea manipulates language and misleads people into doing his will because it serves his self-interest. Modern parallels

are legion!"

Fanciful press reports of the so-called 'Mummy's Curse' or 'Curse of the Pharaohs' following Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and Lord Carnarvon's death, both in 1923, (see FT386:28-36) constitute a sterling example of fake news. It is thought that *Daily Mail* reporter Arthur Weigall, frustrated that Carnarvon had granted exclusive tomb access to rival newspaper *The Times*, was the first to write sensational copy suggesting the Earl's death was the result of an ancient Egyptian curse placed on anyone who dared enter the tomb. Other correspondents swiftly followed Weigall. The enduring nature of the 'King Tut's Curse' story is such that it may still be found in numerous books, blogs and on websites, despite having been thoroughly debunked numerous times.

Another instance of fake news appeared in 1835, when the *New York Sun* published a story (25 Aug) it claimed to have derived from a Scottish newspaper, the *Edinburgh*

Courant. The sensational report focused on the recent discoveries of eminent astronomer Sir John Herschel, stating that Herschel's new telescope, when trained upon the Moon, had observed various animals living in harmony amidst a lunar civilisation. In total, the *Sun* published six stories of fantastical nonsense, including astounding details of unicorns; bi-pedal tail-less beavers; goat-like creatures with blue skin; and giant winged man-bats who passed their time collecting fruit and holding animated conversations; they also constructed a wonderful temple made of polished sapphire (shades of HP Lovecraft?). The Moon, it was claimed, was home to trees, oceans and beaches, all of which had been discovered thanks to "an immense telescope of an entirely new principle".

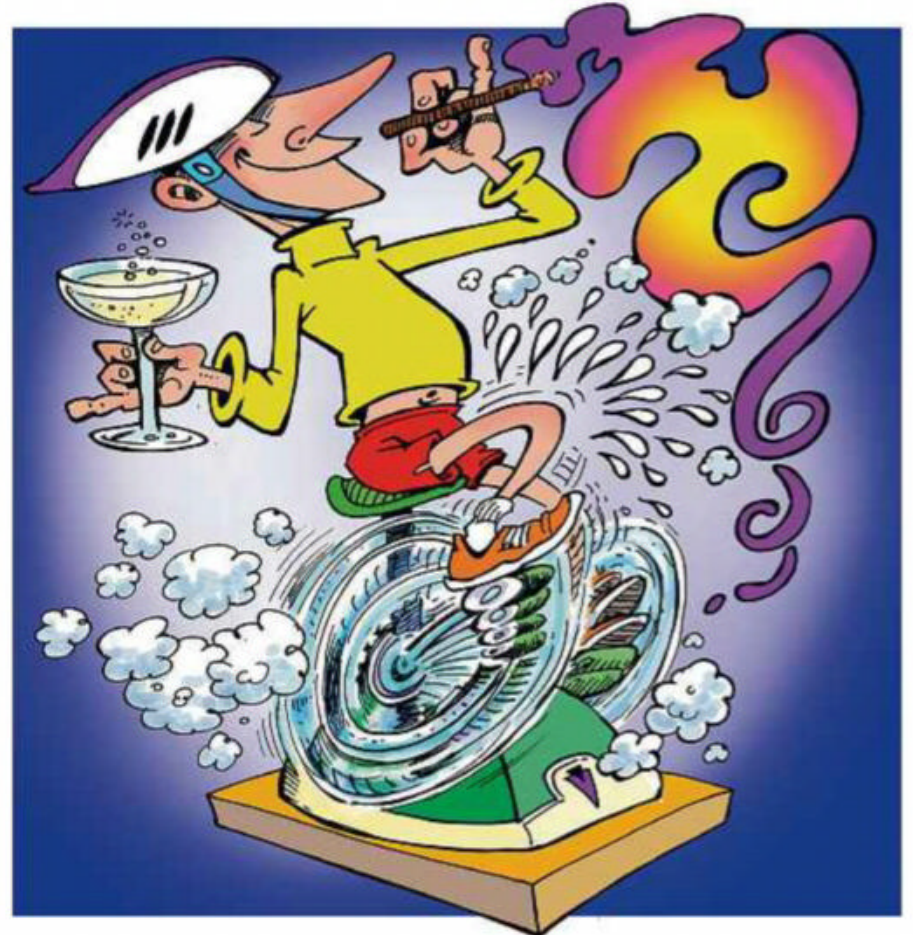
The author was given as one Dr Andrew Grant, supposedly Herschel's travelling companion. However, Grant was completely invented – no such person existed. Eventually it was announced that these staggering observations had come to an end after the telescope had unfortunately been burned by the Sun's powerful rays, its glass set alight, and Herschel's entire observatory incinerated. The actual author was the *Sun's* editor, Richard Adams Locke, and while Herschel was indeed conducting astronomical observations in South Africa at the time, Locke knew it would take months for his hoax to be exposed, since the sole method of communication with the Cape was by letter.

Although this may sound like a pointless farrago of balderdash, it should be noted that the *Sun's* circulation figures reportedly increased from 8,000 to 19,000, and sales remained much higher even after these stories dried up. Herschel himself was unhappy, remarking that his actual lunar observations could never match those of the Great Moon Hoax, and stating how irritating it was when members of the public

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

245: LACTIC ACID



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

When you exercise, lactic acid builds up in your muscles until it gives you “the burn” – pain and fatigue in the lungs and limbs that makes it impossible for you to carry on. The next day, the lactic acid lingers, causing further soreness and tiredness. That’s why, at the end of a day’s hard racing in the Tour de France, the first things cyclists do is to get onto a stationary bike and carry on pedalling while they give their interviews: they are flushing the lactate out of their legs so that they’ll be able to ride again tomorrow.

The “truth”

Lactic acid levels in the body certainly rise during exercise, as glucose is broken down to provide energy, but there is no evidence to show that lactates cause, or worsen, the burn. On the contrary, the acid produced is available as fuel to cells performing a variety of functions. Lactic acid doesn’t stop you – it helps you keep going. Day-after soreness has absolutely nothing to do with lactic acid. The acid does not “pool” in the muscles. A couple of hours after ceasing exercise, your lactic acid levels will be back to normal – and that’s true whether you carry out a rigorous warm-down, like the cyclists, or lie on a sun-lounger smoking a cheroot. Whether the stationary bikes do any good is another debate, but they can’t possibly have any effect on lactic acid levels. Biochemist Otto Meyerhof won a Nobel Prize in 1922 for experiments which established the theory that lactic acid build-up caused muscle fatigue. But his work was done on severed frog legs, electrically stimulated in an airtight jar. Scientists have known for decades that Meyerhof’s findings don’t apply to non-severed, human legs in real life conditions – and gradually, the world of sport is catching up.

Sources

www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2014/04/20/the-lactic-acid-myth/FskVYvZDXQ6k1tR0khM9UN/story.html; www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/lactate-cycling-35412; www.getscience.com/biology-explained/science-fact-or-science-fiction-lactic-acid-buildup-causes-muscle-fatigue-and; www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1922/meyerhof/biographical/

Disclaimer

Exhausted by all this chemistry, we ache for your corrections, via the letters column please, of any errors.

quizzed him about the *New York Sun*’s revelations. The paper never published a retraction or apology. (For more on the Great Moon Hoax, see **FT109:28-30**.)

Earlier examples of the press’s cavalier attitude to truth may be found in 16th and 17th century pamphlets, wherein ‘Trew and Faithfull Relaciouns’ of fantastical events were often published. A Catalan newsbook published in 1654 reported the discovery of a monster with “goat’s legs, a human body, seven arms and seven heads”; a 1611 English pamphlet tells of a Dutch woman who lived for 14 years without eating or drinking.

Earlier still, before the print era, various manuscripts entitled *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* began to be circulated in the 14th century. Purportedly the account of an English knight’s travels in the Holy Land, Africa and Asia begun in 1322, in fact, no such person existed, the work being compiled by an anonymous Flemish or French author. (Anthony Bale’s translation reviewed, **FT296:59**). Cyclopes, cannibals and dog-headed men all appear, as well as blemmyæ or akephaloi, a race of people with no head, instead having their facial features placed squarely in their chests. Here is a sample of the book’s style:

“In the land of Bactria there are trees which grow wool as

you would find on the body of a sheep. Bactria is also filled with griffins, which have ‘the front of an eagle and the back of a lion’, while in Cairo people incubate hens’ eggs in a giant house filled with horse dung”.

Today we like to think of ourselves as better informed, with more trustworthy media outlets and politicians. But recall the British Government’s 2002 September Dossier that claimed Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) including chemical and biological weaponry, deployable within 45 minutes. These spurious claims were reported in much of the British tabloid press as proof that Iraq presented an immediate threat to the UK, and preceded the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Similarly, the US President’s official press secretary described Mr Trump’s 2017 inauguration attendance as “the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe”, despite photographic proof to the contrary, and when such evidence was presented to Mr Trump’s spokesperson, these inaccuracies were described merely as “alternative facts”. Progress? historyanswers.co.uk, 3 May 2017; *D.Telegraph*, 26 Nov 2019. See also ‘Fortfoolery: Forteana and April Fool Hoaxes’ [**FT352:28-31**].



ABOVE: Some of the Moon’s remarkable inhabitants, as pictured in an illustration in the *New York Sun* of 1835.



KARL SHUKER greets two new species that have eluded scientific observation – until now



A FISHY FACE-HUGGER

Media accounts are not unknown for spouting forth some tortuous taxonomic claims when reporting the discovery of new animals, but this latest example is particularly notable. In December 2019, numerous accounts appeared online regarding a supposed fish named after the face-hugging xenomorph entity that appeared in the sci-fi/horror movie *Alien* (1979). Closer inspection soon revealed that said xenomorph lookalike is not a fish at all, nor even a vertebrate, but rather a new species of sea anemone, i.e. belonging to a group of invertebrates closely allied to corals, jellyfishes and hydrozoans.

Discovered at depths of 250-1100m (820-3,600ft) in the Pacific Ocean off Japan and Australia, it has been formally dubbed *Epizoanthus xenomorphaeus*, and attaches itself to a hermit crab. It then secretes a pseudo-shell known as a carcinoecium around the crab, which grows as the crab itself grows (thereby saving the latter from needing to find an empty shell or some other object to use as a shell), so establishing a symbiotic relationship with the crab. University of the Ryukyus researcher Dr Hioki Kise has suggested that this very intimate relationship between sea anemone and hermit crab, to the extent of the anemone constructing a protective shell for the crab, may have evolved in order to adapt to the extreme environments of the deep sea.

www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6554174/face-hugger-fish-found-in-aussie-waters/?cs=14231 20 Dec;
<https://7news.com.au/technology/science/terrifying-alien-fish-discovered-in-aussie-waters-c-615789> 20 Dec 2019.

PURPLE EGGS AND SCARLET SCREAMS

It never fails to intrigue me how eye-catching species can remain hidden in plain sight from human scrutiny for lengthy periods of time, but it certainly does happen, and here is yet another example. December 2019 saw the official description and naming in the journal *Zootaxa* of *Latrodectus umbukwane* – a new species of South African forest-dwelling widow spider (or button spider, as commonly referred to in that country). Visually, it is highly distinctive and conspicuous for three very different reasons. Firstly, its sizeable females may be the biggest on record for any widow spider species. Secondly, they possess a vivid vertical scarlet streak running down their back, which, in combination with a series of white squiggle-like markings surrounding it, creates the unexpected image of a screaming human face (more than a little reminiscent, in fact, of Edvard

LEFT: Not an alien, not a fish, but a new species of sea anemone dubbed *Epizoanthus xenomorphaeus*. BELOW: The Phinda widow – an extremely noticeable spider that went unnoticed by science until 2019.

Munch's famous 'The Scream'), and very eye-catching. So much so that this characteristic is what inspired its species name – *umbukwane* is an isiZulu word for something so noticeable that it simply cannot be walked past. Thirdly, they lay bright purple eggs.

So how has such a spider avoided discovery for so long? Remarkably, and unlike most animals, this spider is so secretive, staying concealed in tree hollows in quite inaccessible, critically endangered sand forests, that it has even remained hidden from local communities, let alone scientific observation. It only came to light in 2014, when a specimen spotted in an elephant reserve was brought to the attention of entomologist Barbara Wright and colleagues at the Wild Tomorrow Fund in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. Rather than collecting it, they chose to leave it alive and on-site within the tree hollow that it was inhabiting, but they visited it regularly to study it there, and eventually it laid a sac of purple eggs, finally dying of old age two years after it had been found. Searches then revealed additional specimens in the area, and analysis of DNA samples confirmed that they represented a new, hitherto undocumented species, now dubbed the Phinda widow spider after the nature reserve where it is known to exist.

<https://gizmodo.com/newly-discovered-widow-spider-lays-bright-purple-eggs-1840264174> 9 Dec 2019.



CHINA'S SPECTACULAR ICE SCULPTURES

Tourists admire a colossal ice sculpture ahead of the opening of the 36th Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival. This year's sculptures are made from approximately 220,000 cubic metres (7,769,227 ft³) of ice blocks, all pulled from the nearby Songhua River. The Festival opened on 5 January in Harbin, in China's northeast Heilongjiang province, and will run until 25 February, featuring not just sculptures but also winter sports, fashion shows and a mass wedding ceremony. PHOTO: NOEL CELIS / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES.





FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Updates on previous FT reports, including mysterious avian fatalities and exotic invaders



DAN DAVISON / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: One of the recent photos from NASA's Curiosity explorer showed an unexplained bright flash on the surface of Mars.

THE PARAKEETS OF LONDON [FT258:23]



Various explanations have been posited to explain how ring-necked parakeets arrived in the UK. According to the RSPB, Britain now has around 8,600 breeding pairs of the raucous, bright green parrots, outnumbering barn owls, nightingales and kingfishers. One rumour claimed that some parakeets escaped from the film set of *The African Queen*, starring Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, set in East Africa, but largely shot at Worton Hall Studios, Isleworth, in 1951. Another suggestion was that flamboyant guitar hero Jimi Hendrix owned a pair of the now-ubiquitous birds, which had escaped from his 1960s Mayfair flat, or even that he had deliberately released a pair (named Adam and Eve) on Carnaby Street in 1968.

However, recent research by University of London's Goldsmiths, University College London and Queen Mary Universities has refuted these theories. Their study employed geographic profiling,

a statistical technique used in criminology, to analyse spatial patterns of parakeet sightings. Applied to biological data, this model can identify origin sites of diseases or introduction sites of non-native species. The study examined over 5,000 unique records dating from 1968 to 2018. None of the "suspect sites" linked to parakeet origin myths (e.g. Isleworth, Carnaby Street) appeared prominently in the resultant geo-profiling. Indeed, the researchers uncovered sightings from the 1860s, and intentional releases in 1929-1931 and 1952. Sensational newspaper stories of human deaths due to psittacosis infections appeared in 1929, and in 1932, the *Middlesex County Times* reported parakeets spotted in Epping Forest, blaming the "parrot disease scare" of 1931. "If you were told you were at risk being near one, it would be much easier to let it out the window than to destroy it", said Sarah Elizabeth Cox, postgraduate history student at Goldsmiths.

The study also noted that by 1961, birds were more popular pets in the UK than cats and dogs, with 11 million captive birds of various species. Thus it

seems obvious there would be an increase in escapes. The first family group appears to have been spotted in Kent in 1969. Their range seems to have expanded in the 1970s, with records of nests in Greater Manchester, Surrey, Essex, Middlesex and Berkshire. The first recorded sighting of a single bird was in Norfolk, 1855, so Jimi Hendrix or The African Queen can finally be ruled out. *BBC News, Times, 12 Dec 2019.*

STARLING APOCALYPSE [FT388:4]



Following the grisly discovery of around 225 starlings found dead or dying in a country lane in Anglesey, North Wales, on 11 December 2019, a Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) investigation has determined that the birds died from injuries sustained upon impact with the ground, while tests for bird flu proved negative. Anne Goodenough, Professor of Applied Ecology (and starling specialist) at the University of Gloucestershire, suggested the birds had been part of a mass murmuration

(when hundreds or thousands of starlings gather in the sky to form co-ordinated, swooping, intricate patterns) but had been disorientated by the Sun's reflection on a wet road. "You could have had quite a lot of glare from that, that could have potentially confused the birds", she said. "We know that can happen to birds, so we get swans and geese, for example, crash landing onto solar panels because they look like lakes. So that kind of almost visual hallucination can occur – whether that is the case here, we don't know".

In 2018, around 10 woodcocks were found dead in various parts of St Helier on the island of Jersey. Mick Dryden, a bird enthusiast, suggested the threatened wading birds might have become disorientated and confused by artificial lights in the town, lights reflected in glass-panelled buildings which they then crashed into. Mr Dryden, Chairman of the Ornithology Section of the Societe Jersiaise, commented: "Most birds are attracted by bright light at night... [but] they will fly around them". *BBC News, 20 Dec 2018; 19 Dec 2019.*

CUBAN SONIC ATTACK [FT359:22]



From mid-2017 onwards, reports began appearing about US diplomats based at embassies in Cuba and China falling sick after being subjected to mysterious sonic 'attacks'. Over 20 diplomatic staff in Havana fell victim to a range of unexplained health problems, which typically began after hearing strange grating or vibrating sounds. Despite strong denials, the US blamed Cuba for the 'attacks', expelling Cuban diplomats and worsening the long-standing diplomatic rift between the two countries. The US also withdrew non-essential



staff from its Havana embassy and advised its citizens not to travel to the Caribbean island.

However, a recently published article ('Challenging the diagnosis of 'Havana Syndrome' as a novel clinical entity', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 2019) suggests Cuba was innocent, and that no intentional targeting of US diplomats occurred at all. The report, co-authored by sociologist and expert in psychogenic illness, Dr Robert Bartholomew, together with neurologist Dr Robert W Baloh, argues that 'Havana Syndrome' (as the concussion-like symptoms became known) was the result of "emotional trauma and fear". The authors propose that 'Havana Syndrome' be considered as a contemporary instance of shell shock, with symptoms comparable to those associated with war trauma: "A characteristic feature of combat syndromes over the past century is the appearance of an array of neurological complaints from an overstimulated nervous system that are commonly misdiagnosed as concussions and brain damage". They add: "A signature feature of shell shock was concussion-like symptoms. Like today, their appearance initially baffled physicians until a more careful review of the data determined that what they were seeing was an epidemic of psychogenic illness. In fact, some of the descriptions from 100 years ago are virtually identical, right down to the use of the phrase 'concussion-like symptoms'".

The diplomats affected by the syndrome were, the article suggests, participants in "a continuation of the Cold War, living in a hostile foreign country where they were under constant surveillance". It notes that "there is a long history of embassy staff suffering harassment at the hands of Cuban agents". The US diplomats were "living in a cauldron of stress and uncertainty", a situation exacerbated by rumours they were being targeted by a sonic weapon. A weapon, the authors say, for which no concrete evidence has emerged in three years. *msn.com / independent.co.uk*, 1 Nov 2019.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

SHAPE-SHIFTER SHORTAGE

The encounter took place in early January 1851 in northern Lancashire. The local newspaper reports that a carter, coming home in the dead of night, saw that "his horse suddenly stopped and appeared much frightened". (You should now feel like you do when watching an expendable character going down a dark alley in a serial killer drama.) "On looking to ascertain the cause, [the carter] perceived as he imagined a large sheep lying in the middle of the road, to which he proceeded with the intention of applying his whip to force its removal. He struck, the blow fell upon vacancy, the supposed sheep aroused itself and as if with indignity at the insult, swelled out as the man affirms, into the size of a house, and then giving him a look of ineffable contempt flew away in a flame of fire." I have my doubts about that word 'house'. Is it possible that the printer mistook a 'u' for an 'r' (a minim more, a minim less) and that the sheep actually became a horse? But horse-size or house-size the carter's vision was pretty extraordinary even before the blaze started.

Congratulations, carter, you have just had a close encounter with a *bona fide* British shape-shifter, as many did in the 1800s. There is no member of the British supernatural petting zoo that I would rather get my hands

on. You get fear, you get amazement, you get the sublime and you get something like a firework display at the end. These monsters date back to 11th-century saints' lives, turn up in mediæval ghost stories, Elizabethan plays (e.g. Puck), folk stories (Hedley Kow, anyone?) and 19th-century encounters and then... nothing. I know of no example

of shape-shifters being seen in the UK after the Great War. There are some fairies described in unusual forms – one imagines they had changed, but the act of changing is not described. Then there is "the large slimy creature on the A628 at Devil's Elbow" in Derbyshire, in, I think, the 1960s: which suggests some shape-changing potential *perhaps*. Chris Woodyard points out to me that the *Occult Review*, April 1920, has a dog that seemed like a calf. But

doesn't that suggest size rather than shape-shifting? Not sure.

The point is that here we have yet another example of the supposedly immutable supernatural itself taking a different form. In the 20th century, ghosts lose their chains; fairies gain wings; shape-changers cease to exist; and demons, don't even get me started on poor demons... What went wrong for shape-shifters? My guess is that they became just too, well, silly for modern tastes, and that they were demoted into black dogs.

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now.

"THE SHEEP
AROUSSED ITSELF
AND AS IF WITH
INDIGNITY AT THE
INSULT SWELLED
OUT INTO THE
SIZE OF A HOUSE"



2020 vision

JENNY RANGLES suggests that new technologies mean new ways to do ufology in the 21st century

As we start a new decade it seemed appropriate to think ahead to how we might develop investigation of the UFO mystery in the next 10 years. Innovations are few and we are not harnessing the advantages of our new, interconnected world in ways that we might. So I wanted to kickstart a debate here and see if FT readers have any ideas about how we might think outside the box.

As an example, one of the research groups (ASSAP) that has its own forum for discussion on Facebook posted news of a new sighting. Three decades ago, when I was one of the original members of ASSAP and also director of investigations for BUFORA, we often had to wait weeks for a sighting to be reported by post and then distributed to a local investigator. Now it can be online within minutes of occurrence. We should be using this opportunity better than we presently do. But how?

In this particular case, reports came from witnesses on a rural road just off the A629 near Halifax in West Yorkshire. A couple aged 24 and 32 were driving home at 5.16pm on 9 November 2019 when they saw a white glow in the dark skies over the moorland. They stopped and got out to watch as they heard the 'roar' of what they took to be fighter jets that seemed to be heading for the UFO. Around them other cars also stopped and sought to attract passing vehicles by flashing headlights and sounding horns. Several others started to film the object and the 'jets'. The couple did so on their mobile phones, but the footage was blurry as the 'jets' were moving fast.

They were wary of reporting such an odd event but were baffled, as no obvious explanation fitted the facts. They had flown drones themselves so knew these objects were much too fast for drones. It was the Saturday after Bonfire Night so a firework was considered an option. However, it too was rejected. Despite being reluctant witnesses, the mother of the driver started an appeal quickly on social media for any of the other witnesses who had filmed the event to come forward in hope they might piece the story together from their footage.

Because this case broke fast and Robert Moore pointed it up on the ASSAP forum I was able to rapidly check flight radar from data now freely accessible online. Matching time and location revealed that, while military aircraft rarely appear on such sites for security reasons, there were indeed two aircraft in exactly the position this report suggests. They were, unusually, flying together but were not military and not jets.



STEVE LYNES / FLICKR

TOP: Video showing the fast-moving 'jets' chasing a UFO. **ABOVE:** Partenavia Observer G-OBSR was airborne at the time and could have been responsible for the 'roar' witnesses heard.

Social media allows us to search for details and follow up on hunches in an investigation

It seemed clear these had to be what was 'chasing' the UFO. But no other radar target nearby obviously matched the UFO itself; other aircraft within 30 miles were too high.

ASSAP are, as I write, continuing their investigation, and I will not pre-empt that; but I was able to follow the course, paths, heights and speeds of the two aircraft and identify them. I followed them after leaving

Halifax, heading south west over Rochdale and the Wirral. They landed at Liverpool John Lennon Airport 25 minutes later. They belonged to Ravenair, based here, and their journey south that evening started in the north east, near Newcastle. These planes were quite unusual (though Ravenair had 11 of them used for things such as aerial surveys). They were G-HUBB and G-OBSR, both Partenavia Observers.

The two planes were travelling at 2,200 (670m) and 2,300ft (700m) respectively (though the moorside road was elevated, so they would appear lower). They flew side by side, at different headings and speeds in a weaving path. One of the two planes was fitted with an unusual open canopy covering much of the front of the cockpit and part

of the floor, providing easy access for wide angle cameras as required if filming wildlife immediately below, for instance.

It will be interesting to see what ASSAP conclude, but I note that some of the witnesses and footage that did emerge on social media supports my conclusion that the 'jets' 'chasing' something were the unusual looking and sounding Ravenair planes. They were very low and would have sounded loud, as witnesses described, when they passed over Mixenden, half a mile from where the couple were parked. One aircraft-savvy witness stated categorically that from the sound heard they were not jets. YouTube has footage from the ground and cockpit of such planes: you can judge the audio for yourself.

I think this case shows a number of things about the UFO mystery and how we might use modern technology in investigating it. It's not only that we have the opportunity to find out quickly what is in the sky at any given time and place (like having your own radar station on call) but we can see how social media allows us to search for details and follow up on hunches in an investigation that in time, cost and practicality would simply not have been feasible before.

In this case, it allowed the collation of other witness reports and a multiplicity of film evidence – made possible by the ubiquity of mobile phones. Meanwhile, a Google search would reveal that this case happened on the 40th anniversary of one of the most famous British close encounters, when Robert Taylor, a forestry worker in Dechmont Law, Scotland, encountered a hovering UFO and was rendered unconscious by 'spikey mines' that emerged from it (see **(FT30:31, 56:48-49, 385:31)**).

This case is best known for being officially investigated as an 'assault' by local police, with forensic study being made of traces found at the site. The BBC reported on the 9 November anniversary, so it's possible UFOs were in the minds of witnesses more than they might normally be on that day.

Another useful and now far easier thing to do is plot online how the sky looked at the time and place of a sighting, revealing astronomical bodies that might resemble UFOs. Doing so here is illuminating: Jupiter was about an hour from setting, low and very bright. Indeed, I was observing it myself around that date as it made a fine sight through good binoculars, with some of the moons visible. It was in the south western sky – the heading of these aircraft – so did it create an illusion of 'military jets' coincidentally 'chasing' a UFO that was in truth a bright planet low in the darkening sky?

Finding evidence and solving cases using the power of modern tech and social media is just one area to consider. We might also think about several other areas. For example, the number of high-powered night vision cameras now trained on us for other reasons. Railcam, for instance, has several beside railway lines that anyone can monitor on line 24/7. Are cameras of similar power around the world able to detect UFOs and be



TOP: Archiving old conference photos is one way of preserving ufological history: here's the author at one of the first Northern UFO Network conferences run by the Nottingham UFO Investigation Society on 10 September 1977. **ABOVE:** The AFU in Sweden provides a home for all sorts of papers and artefacts.

trained to auto record such anomalies if they appear?

Another area is preservation. In Sweden, the marvellous Archives for the Unexplained (AFU) preserves memorabilia, books and magazines (see **FT330:46-49**). When AFU chairman Clas Svahn visited me on his latest trip to the UK I was able to fill in some gaps and will continue to support this project to create a treasure trove of books, press cuttings, rare photographs and artefacts connected to famous cases. Just think what might be in your attic: rather than being left there forgotten, it could be preserved.

Other projects by researchers on the net include scanning and preserving copies of UFO group magazines from the past 60 years and making them accessible to all for research. Even archiving old photos of conferences from years ago – perhaps on social media or a website – could help preserve the history of our subject. I posted a series of such images – like the one

reproduced here – on my Facebook page. Many of you must have others pieces of our legacy at home. Preserve them before they get lost!

What about holding virtual case conferences online, thrashing out notable UFO events on their anniversaries? Anyone who wished to participate could be invited, including specialist experts from outside the field who could bring fresh insights and ideas to help us dig deeper into these classic incidents.

The Internet makes possible, for free, what would have in the past been impossible to coordinate globally given the costs involved: all it needs is the will and the time.

There must surely be other good ideas out there. So, if you have any thoughts on how we can put the advantages of the modern world to use in furthering UFO research, let us know, either via the FT letters pages or by email to me at nufonnews@gmail.com.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

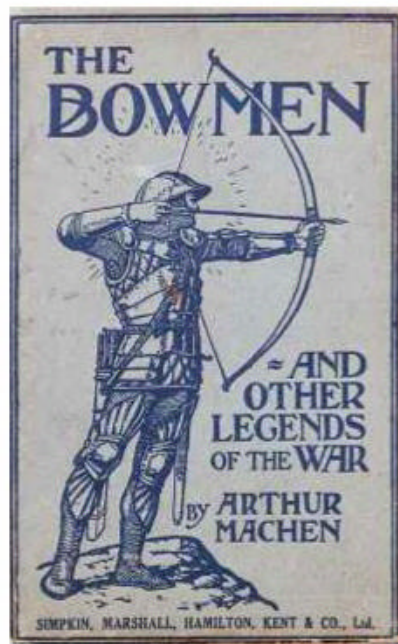
FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

77 MACHEN AND THE MANIKIN OF THE MINE

THEO PAIJMANS finds Arthur Machen assessing news reports about the Little People from the Forest of Dean

Arthur Machen (1863-1947) wrote supernatural tales considered by many to be among the finest of the genre. He explored the occult but remained independent of the esoteric fads and fancies of the times, and in the end no order could claim him. Machen also had a keen eye for the fortean snippets in the dailies, and through him we learn of a very strange case of small humanoids seen around a British mine in Gloucestershire in 1926.

At the time these incidents became briefly known as ‘the manikin of the mine’ or ‘the little man of the Collierie’. Those familiar with Machen’s writings may recall the opening lines of *The Great Return* (1915): “There are strange things lost and forgotten in obscure corners of the newspaper.” Fast forward about a decade to 1926, and these words seem prophetic. That year, Machen discussed a number of strange accounts from the dailies that had come to his attention in *The Graphic*, an illustrated weekly published in London. One subject was witchcraft, which he considered a ‘survival’: “Survivals are always interesting. There was a prosecution for witchcraft somewhere down in the country a week or two ago. The pig was ill, or the cream refused to turn into butter, or the victim was attacked by shooting pains: whatever it was, the suit was brought and the wizard and the witch appeared before the court. The bench dismissed the case, and no more was said, though, to the best of my belief, the prosecutor might himself have been prosecuted...”¹ Even in his lifetime, Machen noted, there were people who still believed in witchcraft and the ability of one person to injure another by, what he called “the exercise of a malignant will”. But there was



LEFT: Arthur Machen, photographed around 1905 and a first edition of *The Bowmen* from 1915.

“This was the business of the Little People in the Forest of Dean, down in Gloucestershire... Two specimens of the Little People had been observed...”

another, much weirder report in the dailies that attracted his attention. This concerned sightings of some very small humanoids. “This was the business of the Little People in the Forest of Dean, down in Gloucestershire... Two specimens of the Little People had been observed, one in the spring, another quite recently. There were, perhaps, six or seven witnesses to the facts,” Machen observed.²

The location of these puzzling events was the New Hawkins Colliery, an ancient mine in Gloucestershire. According to a Forest of Dean correspondent from the *Western Mail*, never before had such an “extraordinary thing” been found during mining operations as what had recently come to light at Poolway Coal Level, the property of one Mr Amos Brown of Wynolls Hill. The Level ran back for a distance of some 500 yards, with miners working in an old pit known as

“the New Hawkins Colliery” that had been closed for a number of years. “The miners were engaged on a solid piece of coal 5ft 6in [1.7m] thick, when Leslie Jones apparently knocked a fossil with his shovel, and was startled by a movement. The creature swerved round, and Jones threw it on top of the coal bank with his shovel.” With the help of a co-worker and Mr Brown, they examined the tiny humanoid: “They found that the body resembled that of a human being, and measured about 14in [36cm] in length. It had a round head about the size of that of a peacock; looked quite human; had two eyes, eyebrows, and eyelashes; little round ears; a flat nose; mouth with a full set of white teeth, and a tongue rounded off like a human being’s tongue. It had about a fourth of an inch [6mm] of soft brown hair on its head, and the skin of its face was the colour of that of a half-caste. It had a short neck and no arms,

nor could it be found that it ever had any, though it had shoulders. The trunk was about six inches [15cm] in length and 19in [48cm] in circumference and was covered with hair like a being of prehistoric age. It had legs almost four-five inches [10-13cm] long and they resembled those of a human being. It was perfectly joined at the knees and ankles. The feet were about three-quarters of an inch [19mm] in length, each having five toes with toenails. Jones stated that blood came from where the shovel struck the creature, which lived for nearly an hour. It made no noise whatever, and life was only distinguished by the slight movement of the body.”³

The mysterious creature was left where they had found it. When they searched for it the following morning it had disappeared. “Naturally, many discredited such a story; but Mr Ames Brown, a well-known colliery proprietor, even today, as well as the workmen, are firmly convinced that the creature was a member of a sub-human, subterranean tribe.”⁴ In support of their story, another sighting of a tiny humanoid surfaced, as told by Mrs T Gwilliam and her family at Eastbourne House: “The family were alarmed by a movement coming from a scuttle of coal, and then from the coal emerged a terrifying looking creature. The daughter screamed, and one member of the family hurled the scuttle and its contents through the front door on to the drive leading to the house. Mrs. Gwilliam said that when the ‘thing’ posed itself on the coal scuttle it looked exactly like a little collier. She was unable to give a detailed description of the creature; but, she said,

she noticed it has legs and arms and a little round head. The most striking feature was its eyes. Its body was well proportioned with shapely hips. Mrs Gwilliam rejected the suggestion that it might have been a frog, toad, or lizard. 'I am certain it is an offspring of the creature which was found in Mr. Brown's Level', she declared. The other members of the family were of the same opinion."⁵

In their time, Machen's stories displayed the peculiar ability to now and then creep out of their publications to settle into the popular mind and change reality. Even now, discussions still rage about how far his *The Bowmen*, published in 1914,⁶ gave rise to the legend of the Angels of Mons, the widely held belief that angelic beings had intervened on behalf of the British troops in Belgium in the second year of the Great War. Machen brushed his short story aside as "an indifferent work", yet he spent the rest of his life arguing it was the origin of the Angels of Mons legend.⁷ But exactly how this had come about he had no clue: "This affair of the Bowmen has been such an odd one from the first to the last, so many queer complications have entered into it, there have been so many and so divers currents and cross-currents of rumour and speculation concerning it, that I honestly do not know where to begin..."⁸ On previous occasions Machen had written about the Little People as well. Just the year before the manikin in the mine case broke, Machen told his readers in *The Graphic* about the Asiki, the Little People of the French Congo.⁹ And in 1932 Machen revisited the topic by retelling the very strange near-kidnapping of an eight-year-old girl by the Little People.¹⁰

With regard to the survival of ancient convictions that Machen mentioned, in 1926



ABOVE: Miners bring out coal out from a small, privately owned mine in the Forest of Dean in 1931.

the belief in Little People was still strong, as was evident in opinions concerning what the tiny manikins of the mine might be. "Coleford, the scene of these strange appearances, holds various theories as to the Little People," Machen explained. "Some hold that they are fairies, others that they are descendants of a dwarfish race, which, they say, lived long ago in the Forest, and was forced to go underground. And there are some who think that they are animals of some unknown and un conjectured genus, who, as it would seem, inhabit the coalmines.

"The most interesting suggestion of the three is the identification of the little brown beings with the pre-Celtic inhabitants of the country, the underground dwellers who originated the Irish fancies about fairy raths. There was such a race of short, dark people, who did, in fact, live subterraneously, and survived far into the Celtic age. But the people of this race must have been about four feet

[1.2m] – not 14 inches [36cm] – high."¹¹

The local workmen harboured no doubts about the reality of their extraordinary find. After all, they had seen the frightening creature with their own eyes. "You can tell the people from me," Brown told a reporter, "that it is only too true, and, what is more, I did not like the look of him. We were all a bit nervous at the time, for it looked an ugly little brute. I could not rest overnight, and on the following morning when I decided to preserve it, I found it had gone. In my experience I have seen many fossils of different animals, but have never seen a thing like that. It was more like a human being than I have ever seen before."

An unnamed authority that the newspaper produced thought otherwise. Only identified as "one of the most distinguished naturalists in Wales today" by the *Western Mail*, he offered a plausible explanation: "The answer is – a bat... A bat, hibernating

through the cold months, seeks a cave or crevice, and there hangs with head downwards, with its wings so tightly pressed behind it that, looking at it from the front or above as it fell on its back, they could not be seen, and would give the effect of an armless trunk with well-marked shoulders. Shaken from its perch in a rocky crevice it would fall and, only partly awakened a month at least too early, would lie almost without movement, and with no effort at escape. The miners of the New Hawkins Colliery may rest assured that if the 'little man of Poolway' gave them a shock, they gave him a much more severe one."¹² Machen must have read this rebuttal, but for reasons of his own that are now unfathomable, he remains quite opaque as to the conclusion. He writes: "As to the 'facts' of the Coleford case, I say nothing. But I think that there must be a mistake somewhere."¹³

An ambiguous final verdict that one might approach from either direction.

NOTES

1 Arthur Machen, 'The Little Brown Things', *The Graphic*, 13 Feb 1926.

2 Ibid.

3 'A Living Fossil. Prosaic Solution of a Mystery in a Dean Forest Mine', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 29 April 1925.

4 'The Mannikin.

Weird Creature In Old Mine. Living 'Orange Head'. 'Human Being Only 14 Inches In Height', *Liverpool Echo*, 30 Jan 1926; 'Gnomes In Life. Weird Traveller's Tale', *Western Star and Roma Advertiser*, Toowoomba, Queensland, 13 Feb 1926.

5 Ibid.

6 In 1915 *The Bowmen* was published in two editions. The story was originally published in the *Evening News*, 29 Sept 1914.

7 David Clarke, 'The Bowmen of Mons and Mars', *FT319:54-55* (2014).

8 Arthur Machen, *The*

Bowmen and other Legends of War, Putnam's, 1915, p1.

9 'The Little People', *The London Graphic*, 11 July 1925. Collected in Arthur Machen, *Dreads and Dolls*, Secker, 1926, under the title 'The Little Beings of the Forest'.

10 "The Strange Tales

of Mount Nephim", *Dalton Citizen*, 11 Feb 1932. Collected in Arthur Machen, *The Glitter of the Brook*, Postprandial Press, 1932.

11 Machen, 'The Little Brown Things'.

12 'Dean Forest Little Man. Fossil That Bled & Breathed. Mystified Miners. Prosaic

Solution To The Problem', *Western Mail*, Glamorgan, 29 April 1925.

13 Machen, 'The Little Brown Things'. *The sources for notes 9 and 10 were kindly provided by Raymond Russell, chairman of The Friends Of Arthur Machen.*

THE TERRIFYING WORLD OF JACK CHICK

PETER LAWS explores the work of the shy cartoonist who flooded the world with visions of Hell and theories of demonic conspiracy in an attempt to scare sinners into seeing the light

When I mentioned on social media that I was writing an article about the late cartoonist Jack Chick, the response was immediate. Posts and messages pinged all day from people saying they'd been traumatised by his work. Some felt anger, some disgust. Some called him cruel and said they'd hated him since childhood. One even told me that she and her friends threw an online party when they heard he'd died in 2016. Others guiltily admitted that while they despised the man, they loved his art and even collected it, sometimes in secret (my own collection stacks up at about 120 Chick works, so far).

Everyone who'd seen his work seemed to have been 'affected' by it, and perhaps that's no surprise. Chick's art is an unforgettable parade of the grotesque, featuring teenagers hanging themselves, fathers raping their daughters and men eating severed fingers in the rain. Yet it wasn't the grisly themes that really shook people, it was the messages behind them – coupled with a level of political incorrectness that would make the entire Twittersphere explode.

You see, Chick was a devoted Christian, and his Chick Tracts (small religious comic books) weren't only anti-gay, anti-evolution, and pretty much anti-everything, they were primarily designed to save us all from Hell.

One commentator called him "the most widely read theologian of all time", and with over 900 million Chick Tracts printed so far, you can see why. His most popular is called *This Was Your Life*. It's been translated into 120 languages (I own one in Zulu), spreading a terrifying vision of evangelical conspiracy theory across the globe. The world, according to Jack Chick, is infected with demonic corruption at all levels of society, politics and (especially) religion.

What made his work even more unsettling, was *how* it came to most people. Folks



LEFT: Chick tracts all share a simple yet memorable design.

didn't find his art in galleries, read his strips in a newspaper or find his tracts in the local comic book store. Rather, Chick's work seemed to find *them*, magically appearing in the public places where they happened to be. People told me they'd found Chick Tracts tucked in the magazines at the doctor's office or waiting for them in a public toilet cubicle, perched on the paper dispenser. One man opened up a brand-new heavy metal record to find that, unbeknownst to the store, a Chick Tract had been hidden inside the sleeve. Many others were simply handed tracts directly by strangers in the street – like the hiker who told me about the time he asked a friendly old couple for directions on a poorly marked trail. They slipped a Chick Tract into his hand. For what better direction can there be than one which will help you escape the fires of Hell, as depicted vividly, and repeatedly, in Chick's work? If you haven't found a Tract waiting for you yet, the Chick

faithful might say the reason is a cosmic one – the Devil has been actively keeping them from you. Until now, of course. This article might be your own chance to see 'the light'.

Such is the mystique that surrounds a Chick Tract's journey from pencil, to eye, to soul. It's seen as part of a divine publishing vision that hopes Chick's work will find everybody in the end.

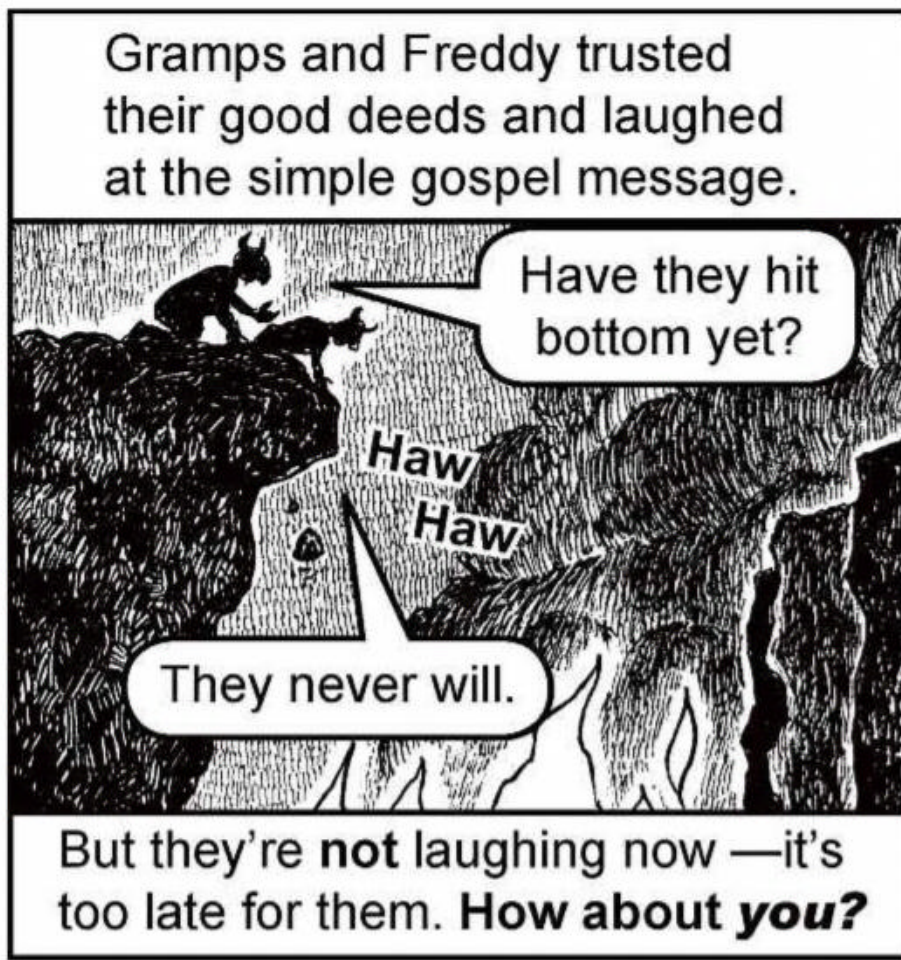
GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

You can spot a Chick Tract instantly. At about 13x7cm, and roughly 20 pages long, the iconic little booklets are just a tad smaller than a bank note. That's a perfect size for believers to carry in a wallet or tuck into a breast pocket, ready for quick deployment. The covers have stark white text on a sombre, black background on one side, and a two-tone illustration on the other. The pictures

Chick Tracts are the perfect size for believers to tuck into a pocket







ABOVE: Gramps and Freddy are cast into the bottom level of Hell in *Some Like it Hot* – but readers can escape their fate, as the tract's final panel shows.

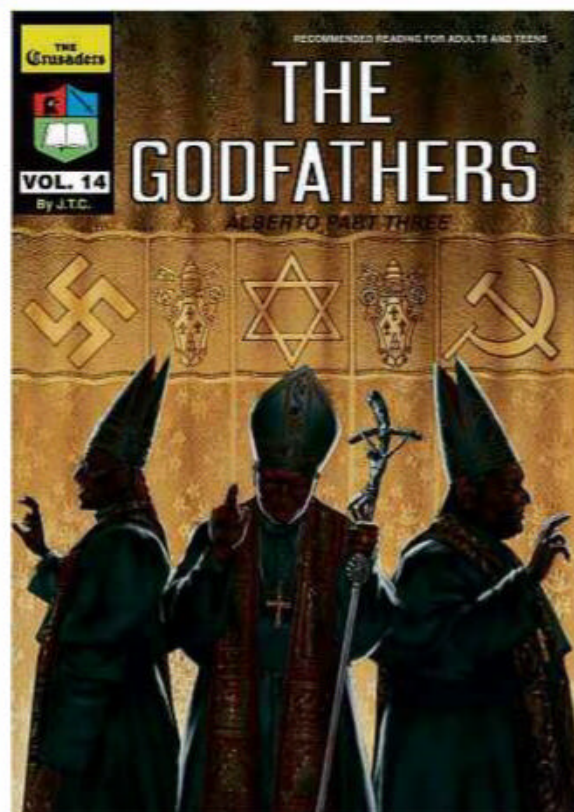
BELOW: *The Godfathers* comic revealed the full extent of what Chick saw as the Catholic Church's evil, from the creation of Communism to the Ku Klux Klan.

are usually the stuff of nightmares. Take the tract 'The Beast', for example, which shows two weeping parents and their obedient child. They're being touched by a beringed and robe-shrouded hand reaching from out of the frame. The family have 666 scrawled onto their foreheads: the Mark of the Beast. Imagine finding *that* on your doorstep. Many didn't have to imagine. They just did.

Of course, many people who stumble upon Chick Tracts will throw them straight in the bin, disgusted by comics decrying "Satan's shadowy world of homosexuality" (see *The Gay Blade*). Others hold on to them, fascinated by their bizarre, kitsch sensibility. Yet for decades, considerable numbers have picked up these little black shockers and 'found the Lord'; and they are eager to thank Chick Tracts for opening their eyes to "the truth".

I spoke to David Daniels who took over the running of the company after Chick died. He told me they have cabinets full of testimonies from people who state not only that they were saved by Chick's work, but which particular tract did the trick. Their website features many conversion stories, such as that of the pastor who says: "I was saved in jail in 1984 after reading a Chick tract!" Or the 15-year-old Hispanic reader: "A lot of people have joined our church and been born again by the tracts." Or the soldier: "One constant throughout my life is those pesky little Chick tracts that I seemed to find no matter where in the world I went. Even when I was stationed in Japan, there they were. By His grace I am found at last. Thank you for being there all my life." Daniels even told me of a pastors'

Catholics had created both Communism and the Ku Klux Klan



conference where the audience were asked how many people were saved by the tract *This Was Your Life*. A third of hands went up. According to Chick Publications: "These people were spared a Christless, agonising eternity, because of a given, or well-placed

Chick Tract."

Perhaps so many convert because it's too scary *not* to. After all, Chick eagerly reminds his readers they could die "this very night" (probably in a horrible car crash or due to a demonic STD). Such grim deaths are, however, only the start. The tracts' true horror comes post-mortem, with hand-drawn panels of foolish unbelievers plunging headlong into the lake of everlasting fire. If only they'd taken their Chick Tracts seriously! Such urgency (coupled with a sense of divine guidance produced by the way these tracts somehow 'found them') have shocked and inspired what Daniels calls "thousands upon thousands" of people into repentance. And if they don't know how to become born again, then Chick Tracts make it easy. A printed sinner's prayer sits on every back page, along with a blank space for the address of a local church.

Chick Tracts don't just resonate with 'sinners', either. Christians love them too, since they're the ideal method of evangelism for many modern churchgoers. Chick started his ministry in a post-war America which was increasingly willing to challenge the authority of the Church. If you shared your faith, people might no longer nod in quiet agreement, as they had in the past; and they might try and tear your argument apart, instead. With Chick Tracts, the faithful didn't have to preach on street corners, or even get into a conversation with a fellow bus passenger. They could just slip a stranger a comic and get the heck out of there, unnoticed and unchallenged. Chick was open about being a shy person himself, so this hit-and-run method was very appealing,

because even the most timid of Christians could (and indeed *should*) become an evangelist. Theological training was not required, since Chick had researched ‘the facts’ for them. Yet what he taught (and this is absolutely key to understanding his impact) wasn’t just that he was spreading the Gospel – literally, ‘the good news’. There was also some *very* bad news he wanted to share – like the fact that our world is wracked with demonic evil and mind-blowing levels of conspiracy; much of it could be traced back to one source: Rome.

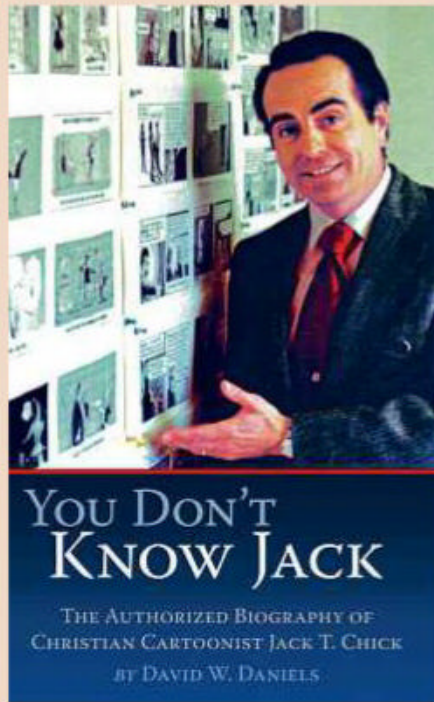
EXPOSING THE WHORE

Chick’s world is filled with corrupt and evil groups, but almost all seem to thread back to the Vatican and the Jesuits in particular. He believed Catholics were the ‘whore of Babylon’ as revealed in the book of Revelation, and so he produced a wealth of tracts and comics filled with a dizzying array of anti-Catholic accusations. In a tract called *The Poor Pope*, for example, he claimed that the Jesuits had helped engineer the American Civil War and arranged to have Lincoln assassinated. In the *The Four Horseman* he argued that the Vatican masterminded the Freemasons, the Illuminati, the New Age movement and the Mafia. In *The Storyteller* he claimed the Jesuits organised an assassination attempt on the Pope, and “carefully chose a Muslim to shoot Pope John Paul II. This was to guilt-induce the Muslim world, bringing them still closer to the Roman Catholic Faith!” In *Allah Had No Son* he said that the Catholic Church invented Islam and that Muhammad was, in fact, a Vatican agent who simply picked “the Moon god” Allah from a list of 360 idols.

In the full-colour comic book *The Godfathers* he told the story of how Catholics had created both Communism and the Ku Klux Klan; presumably, the Klan’s well-documented hatred of Catholics was a cover story to keep people off the scent. In *Holocaust* Chick even accused Rome of backing Adolf Hitler (along with Mussolini and Franco) and claimed they were the true architects of the Holocaust itself, because they despised the Jews (who Chick wholeheartedly supported). In *The Beast* the Pope was revealed as “Satan’s masterpiece”, nothing less than the Antichrist, and Rome’s mission as turning the world away from the true Messiah, Jesus. According to Chick, one of the primary tactics employed by Catholics was to spread theological confusion. They did this by dismissing the King James Version of the Bible – the only true translation according to Chick. It’s a principle that’s still strongly defended by Chick Publications today. For Chick, and his many followers, alternative Biblical translations didn’t reflect developments in linguistics and history or new cultural understandings, they were obvious works of Satanic deception (see the tract *The Attack* for more).

In *The Death Cookie* and *Man in Black* Chick exposed the use of Communion wafers and the doctrine of transubstantiation (which states that the Communion elements mysteriously become the body and blood of Christ). He said this idea came from ancient Egyptian

A HISTORY OF JACK



Jack Thomas Chick was born in 1924. He was a sickly child, whose ears were lanced by the doctors a dozen times before he was a year old. In an open letter to his followers in 2000, Chick suggested this early ill health was the result of his mother’s attempt to abort him. (For his views on this topic see the tract *Who Murdered Clarice?* where he describes abortion in America as “the new holocaust!”). However, the Almighty had bigger plans, and Jack survived the perils of the womb. He was born into an opportune decade, coming of age in the 1940s, when the golden age of comic books was in full swing. Detective strips and superhero serials were everywhere; as were the infamous Tijuana Bibles: full-on pornographic parodies of Mickey Mouse, Dick Tracey and Popeye. Whether Chick read these shocking little strips is anybody’s guess, but the Tijuana

Bible format (palm-sized eight-pagers) are certainly the closest match to what would become the Chick Tract format. ¹

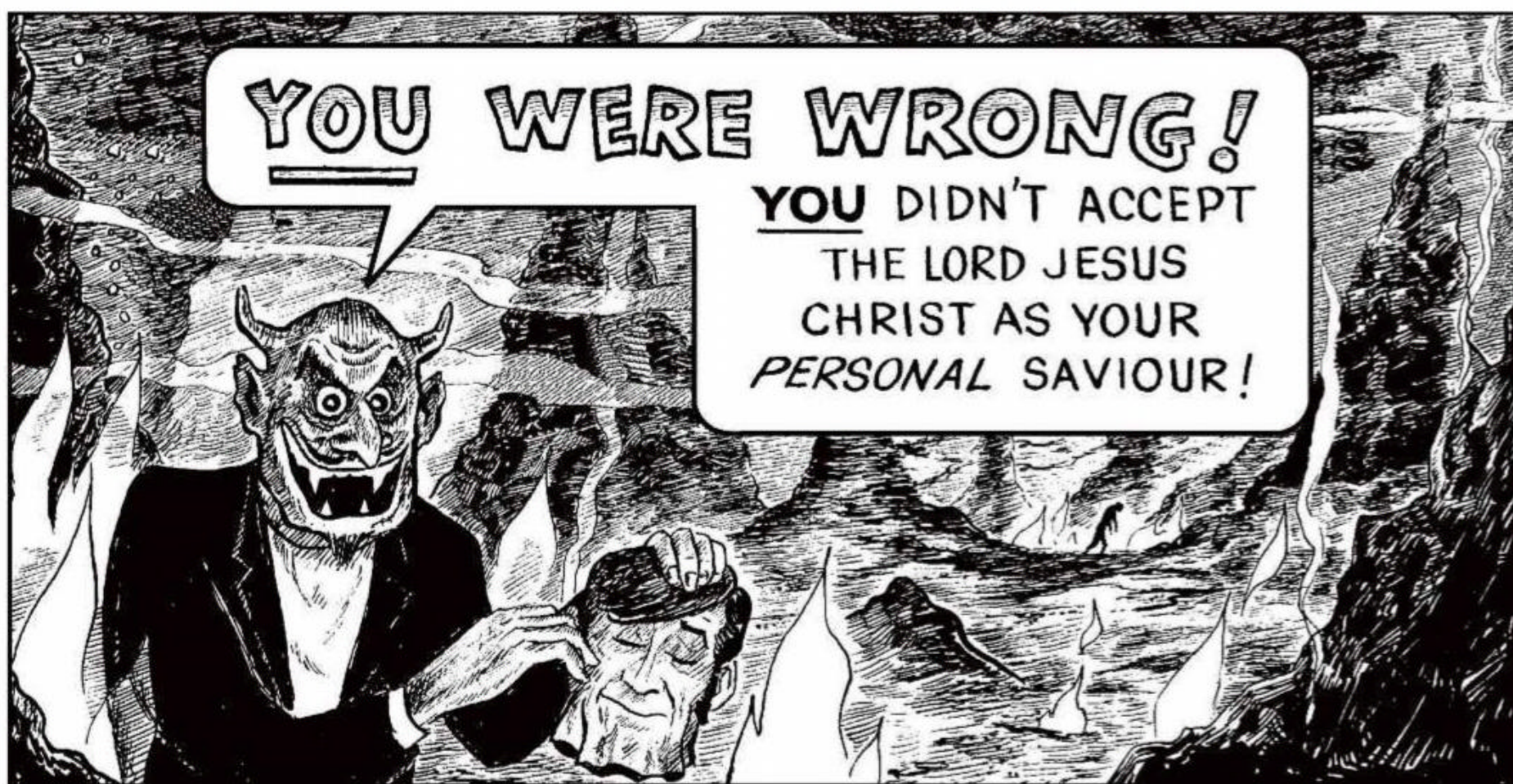
According to *You Don’t Know Jack*, the official biography by David Daniels, the world tried to corrupt Chick from an early age. For example, Catholic members of his extended family forced him to blaspheme in exchange for food, and they pressured him into seeing a fortune-teller. Such events clearly affected his view of Catholics, but at school he kept himself out of major trouble with a love of sketching and a passion for drama. In 1942 he beat 50 other candidates to win a two-year paid scholarship to the Pasadena Playhouse School of Theatre. Bigger drama was to come: in 1943, during his second semester, World War II whisked him off to serve in New Guinea, Australia, the Philippines and Japan, although as a cryptographer he never once saw a gun being fired.

Chick was not yet a Christian while serving in the Army, but he did show distaste for ‘sinful ways’. When stationed in Japan, for example, he declined an invite to a red-light district. He pretended he was married and said that he’d rather stay faithful. He didn’t have to wait long. He met his real-life wife back at the Playhouse after the war. She was called Lola Lynn, though he sometimes called her his ‘Honey Girl’. In 1948, he and Lola visited her fundamentalist parents in Canada on their honeymoon and his new in-laws insisted he listen to the Charles E Fuller Old-Fashioned Revival Hour on the radio. Chick said it was the first time he had really heard the “precious message of the Gospel” and his faith blossomed over the next decade. In the 1950s he was working in the aerospace industry as a technical illustrator, and even did some syndicated comic strips in newspapers, but it didn’t take long for his artistic skills to fuse with his faith.

By the 1960s Chick had already started writing tracts – he and his wife Lola turned his kitchen into a production space. Yet what became the true calling of his life was kick-started when he met missionary and radio broadcaster Bob Hammond. Bob said that the Communists had been taking control of China through a series of small, illustrated books. Chick’s vision was galvanised. Perhaps God might use his own little books to start a Christian counter-revolution that might challenge not only Communism but every other evil ‘ism’ that threatened to ruin the world. And for Chick, almost every ‘ism’ was evil.

The following decades saw his tract output grow and grow, particularly in 1972, when he hired the talented artist Fred Carter to help keep up with demand. As the company developed, so did the controversy around Chick’s shocking worldview...

¹ It’s certainly reasonable to think Chick caught the infamous EC horror comics of the 1940s and 1950s, as his style and themes so clearly resemble them, (even down to the ‘Haw Haw’ laughter of his characters). Censorship pressures led to the EC horror comic line becoming defunct in 1956 (see **FT320:28-35**). In some ways, Jack Chick resurrected their approach, albeit with very different motivations.



ABOVE: A particularly terrifying panel from the tract *Somebody Goofed*. BELOW: Alberto Rivera, Chick's Catholic whistleblower.

priests controlled by Satan himself. The Christogram 'IHS' wasn't a contraction derived from the Greek for Jesus, as most Christians believed: it was a blatant homage to the Egyptian Gods, Isis, Horus and Seb.

When he wasn't calling Catholic tradition plain evil, Chick labelled it useless, as in *The Last Rites*, in which John, a supposedly Godly man, is dying after being hit by a car. He's given his last rites, which he assumes is his ticket to Heaven... until page 21, where a straight-talking God tells him he's heading straight for Hell! The implication is that Catholic rituals are a waste of time. Crucially, John had foolishly torn up the Chick Tract given to him on page 18 and called it "baloney". Bad move.

Considering the scale of Chick's output, such divisive views had a significant impact. Protestants already had sometimes uneasy relations with their Catholic neighbours, and yet, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, Chick was now telling them that they should be *terrified* of the Church of Rome. Not least because the Vatican held a supercomputer that listed the name of every single Protestant in the world. These files would be used for an organised persecution in the coming days, which might even include murder. In *My Name... in the Vatican?* Chick claimed that the Catholic Church had already murdered 68 million people between 1200 and 1800.

Unsurprisingly, Catholics weren't impressed, especially when they kept finding these inflammatory booklets left on the steps of their churches or tucked into new books by the Pope at Catholic stores. Yet just as controversial as the claims themselves was the source of all this information.

Demons are assigned to corrupt people on a bespoke basis



Alberto Magno Romero Rivera (1935-1997) insisted he was a former Jesuit priest and bishop who, by the time he met Chick, was weary of all the corruption. He became a whistleblower and, along with Chick, tried to expose what he believed was the most evil organisation on the planet. Entire tracts were designed around Rivera's claims, and most notably a comic-book sized spin off series called *The Crusaders* was created by Chick Publications and showed Rome at its most depraved.

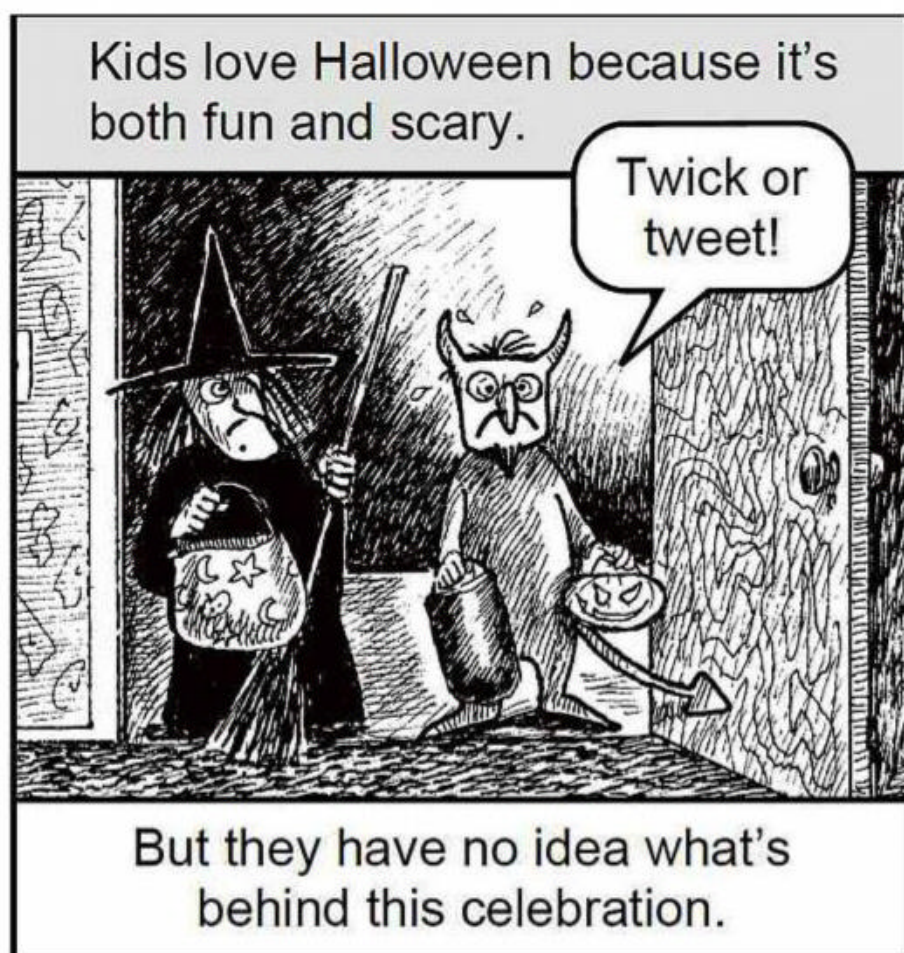
Rivera said his insider knowledge was legit and that he'd been given access to the

secret underground libraries at the Vatican. Critics (Catholic and Protestant alike) asked for proof of his hysterical accusations. Chick responded by publishing Rivera's 1967 ID card, along with letters of certification and other supposed proofs, insisting they weren't forgeries. Yet few outside the Chick worldview were convinced. In 1980, the widely-read Catholic newspaper *Our Sunday Visitor* even offered a \$10,000 reward to any reader who could produce solid evidence to back up such anti-Catholic accusations. Nobody claimed it – not even Chick himself. Other evidence surfaced instead, suggesting that Rivera had faced various fraud charges and had even fathered two children during his supposed period of celibacy. No official record of Rivera's ordination was ever found. No certificates. No underground library tickets. This was enough to turn even Chick fans away, but Jack himself (and many of his followers) remained loyal to Rivera. After all, any evidence that painted Rivera in a bad light was just a Catholic plot to silence him!

Today, Chick Publications continue to scatter public spaces with its warnings about the Whore of Babylon, based on Rivera's claims. This same reliance on controversial 'advisors' would help shape Chick's approach to another of his favourite targets: the organised legions of demonic cults.

A GIGANTIC WITCHES' COVEN

Satan and his minions leer from the pages of many Chick Tracts, but they aren't some wild gang of unruly renegades. For Chick, the demonic world was a meticulously strategic movement, focused on the destruction of all that's good. In *The Assignment*, Chick shows highly organised demons, assigned

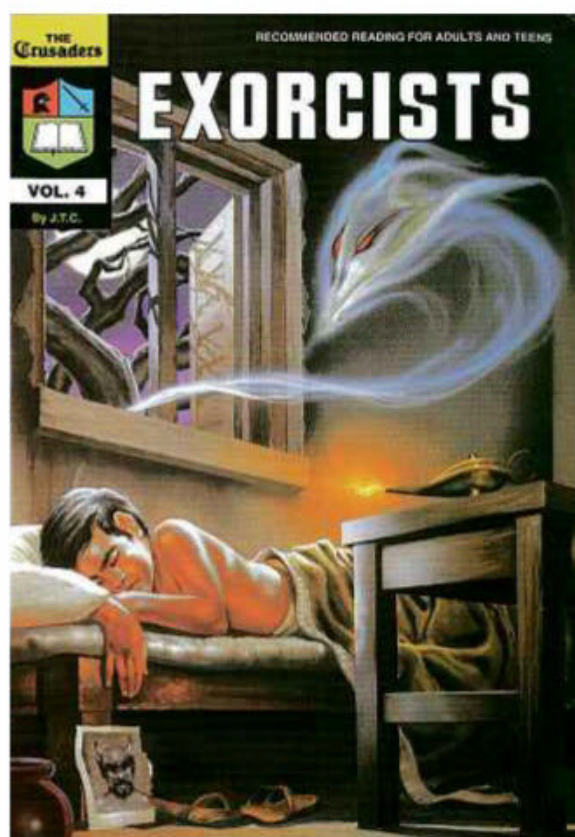


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ABOVE: Chick's war on Hallowe'en inspired a number of tracts such as *Boo*. BELOW: The full-colour *Exorcists* comic revealed the Satanic nature of various deities.

to corrupt people on a bespoke, individual basis. They like nothing better than encouraging sin, and they work with the Catholics to create and sustain all the cults and new religions of the world. In *The Curse of Baphomet* (updated as *That's Baphomet?*) a Christian tells his Freemason friend Alex that he's not part of a friendly order of brothers after all – he's actually worshipping the goat-headed demon, Baphomet! (See FT365:28-35 for more on Baphomet.) Alex just isn't high enough in the order to be privy to this knowledge. In *Good Old Boys* Chick has a South American Masonic clan machine-gun a church full of Christians, and in *The Visitors* he reveals that the Mormons serve the demonic god of Baal, while their founder Joseph Smith is shown to have worshipped Jupiter. In the *Crusaders* comic *Exorcists* we learn that there are 300 million Hindu deities and, naturally, "all of them are Satanic!"

As well as the undercover demons hiding behind the mask of 'religion', Chick took particular delight in depicting the more overt works of Satan. His cartoons are filled with horror-film sketches of robed figures stabbing victims on altars and undressing for grim, orgiastic rituals. Chick lay much of the blame for Satanism at the door of pop culture, which he saw as a prime tool for ushering in an age in which demons were acceptable and even desirable. A key figure in the hellish propaganda machine was the 1960s show *Bewitched*, which Chick saw as a gateway drug into Devil worship. Subsequently, his tracts both reflected, and helped fuel, much of the Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 1990s. In an open letter dated 23 December 1996, he singled out Saturday



morning cartoons as a recruiting tool for Satan's army. Dungeons and Dragons was another particularly insidious threat. His infamous 1984 tract *Dark Dungeons* showed how D&D could only ever lead to despair and suicide and helped turn the tide of public opinion against roleplaying games in the 1980s.

He kept this up for decades, claiming that our culture is now littered with such doorways to evil. In *The Nervous Witch*, Samantha (a potential nod to – or sneer at – Elizabeth Montgomery's character in *Bewitched*) supports her witch friend – who shouts things like "God is dead!" and "Witches rule!" – until a Christian confronts Samantha, explaining that her mind has

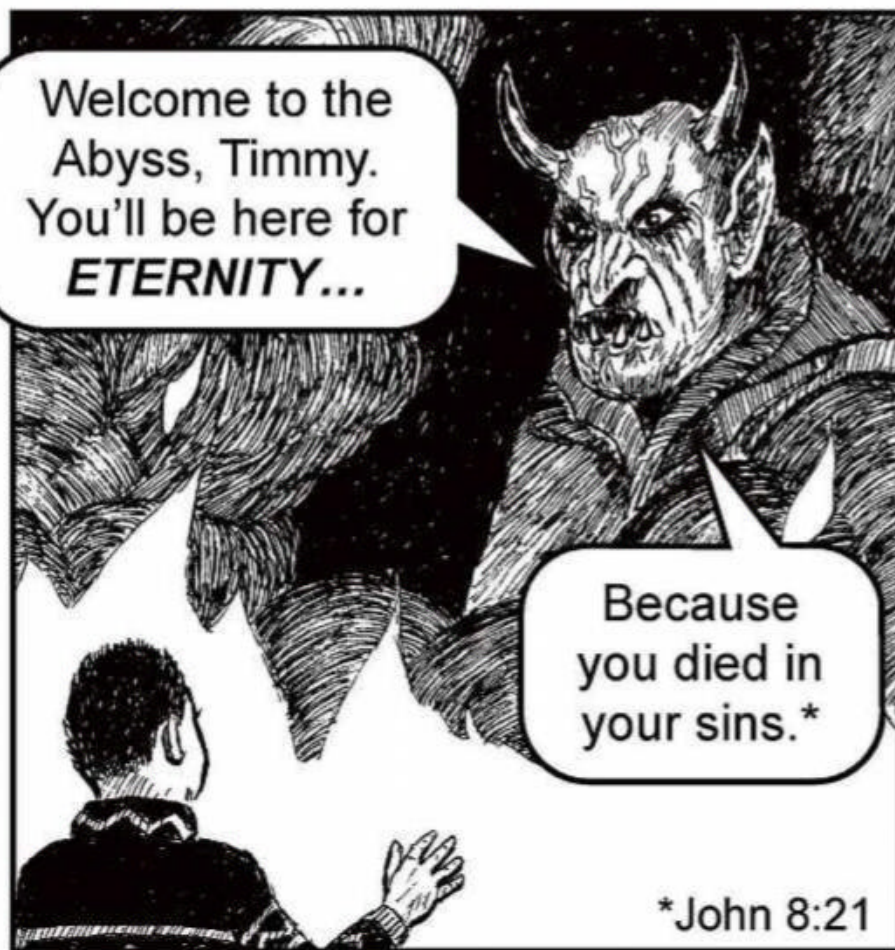
been warped... by Harry Potter.

Most dangerous of all, however, was Hallowe'en, which became the target of much of Chick's ire. In *The Devil's Night*, he claimed Hallowe'en was invented by ancient pagan priests in England; the tradition of trick or treating is a reminder of how they used to go from door to door demanding sacrifices for their false god. If the families had nothing to give, the priests took a child and slaughtered it instead. This, he claimed, was the 'true' origin of the 'sick' custom. Kids in the modern world were still at risk. In *The Trick*, Druids give out Hallowe'en candy laced with pins, razor blades, crushed glass and poison.

Hallowe'en remains a regular target for Chick Publications, and not just because it's supposedly the principal night for demonic hi-jinks; it also provides a perfect opportunity for the Chick model of evangelism. Believers are encouraged to stock up on tracts, particularly the ones with Hallowe'en themes, because a ready audience of potential believers is going to come knocking at your door. What could be better than to give them a *real* treat – a bag of candy with a little comic tucked inside. After all, according to the latest issue of their newsletter, *The Battle Cry*, "Kids Love Chick Tracts!"

Hallowe'en wasn't the only time Satan came out to play. He and his cronies were working all year round and, according to Chick, had infiltrated every walk of life. Even the Christian music industry wasn't safe. In his comic 'Spellbound' Chick warns that the growing popularity of Christian rock bands was hardly a wholesome alternative to secular acts like ACDC. For

HTTPS://WWW.CHICK.COM/PRODUCTS/ITEM?STK=0104



Chick, even a Christian version of metal could only ever be Satanic. For a start, the music itself (or more specifically, the drums) possessed inherent demonic power. The comic claims that “the same beat the Druids used is in the rock music of today... in both hard and soft rock, the beat is *still* there!”

Chick was keen to show how comprehensively this ‘Druid music’ could corrupt. In his infamous tract *Angels* a Christian rock band called Green Angels signs with an agent called Lew Siffer (Geddit? Chick’s strips are filled with names like this). After they sign a contract in blood, their career descends into chaos and tragedy. Band member Bobby turns gay and wants to marry a man. So Siffer thinks: “I’ll give you a little wedding present... some AIDS!” Bobby soon dies from it, while Jim overdoses and Don somehow gets sucked into ‘vampirism’. Tom is the only band member to get out alive, because he finds Christ through a Chick tract and promptly starts telling everyone to burn their rock albums.

Claims of such widespread demonic conspiracy were bolstered by Chick’s growing bank of controversial advisors, such as Rebecca Brown. She was a medical doctor whose books were published by Chick in 1986 (*He Came to Set the Captives Free*) and 1987 (*Prepare for War*). Brown shared the story of Elaine, who claimed to have been a senior member of Satanic group ‘The Brotherhood’. So senior, in fact, that she was formally married to Satan himself. Elaine warned of a world that chimed with Chick’s fears. She’d witnessed baby sacrifices and the summoning of eight-foot tall demons. She’d even met the Pope in the Vatican, so they might strategise together for Satan. She met ‘rock music stars’ who



had sold their souls to the Devil, and on two occasions she even met a werewolf. Zombies and vampires also exist, she says, but this is a “very closely guarded secret by Satan”.

Chick was fascinated by Brown’s claims and, as well as publishing her books, he used her story as an inspiration for tracts like *The Poor Little Witch*, where a young girl called Mandy is lured into witchcraft on the promise it will improve her netball skills. She’s put off when her new Satanist friends slaughter an infant in front of her and force her to drink the child’s blood from a chalice, and she turns to Christ instead.

Like Alberto Rivera before her, Rebecca Brown was quickly denounced as a fraud by critics. Some accused her of being a paranoid schizophrenic, and she lost her medical licence. She

ABOVE: Timmy finds himself in the Abyss in *Happy Halloween*. LEFT: *Spellbound* saw Chick warning of demonic influences in rock music. BELOW: Rebecca Brown’s books described all manner of Satanic horrors.

claimed this was all part of the conspiracy, and that the hospital where she worked had been overrun by witches. David Daniels admitted to me that her books made “a lot of money” but I noticed they no longer sell them on the site. When I asked him why, he simply said that “One day Jack was praying, and the Lord told him to give Rebecca all her stuff back.” So, he obeyed. “He gave her the plates, the rights, all the work, everything.” Brown went on to find another publisher. Her books may be gone from the Chick site, but her influence is still felt through the tracts today.

Another key Chick advisor was John Todd, who claimed to be a former Grand Druid on a mission to expose the secrets of the Illuminati. Todd was convinced that JFK had faked his own death, and that the actress Cindy Williams (Shirley, from *Laverne and Shirley*) had started a witch cult which became one of the largest homosexual covens in California. In the 1970s, several of Chick’s full-colour comics were based on Todd’s claims.

As we’ve seen, the world of Jack Chick is a nightmarish one. Despite his mission to get us all to Heaven, it’s ironic that he seemed to find that destination uninspiring, artistically speaking. His depictions of a Christian paradise are weirdly banal, with a faceless God – looking more like a giant anthropomorphic alien – sitting on a mysterious throne. Yet, in Chick’s comics, the sicko witches, the fanged demons, the slobbering, obese Catholic priests are all vivid, detailed and full of life. Chick may



have claimed to be a bastion of light, but he seemed far more creatively inspired when depicting evil. Perhaps, that's because he'd seen the powers of darkness close at hand...

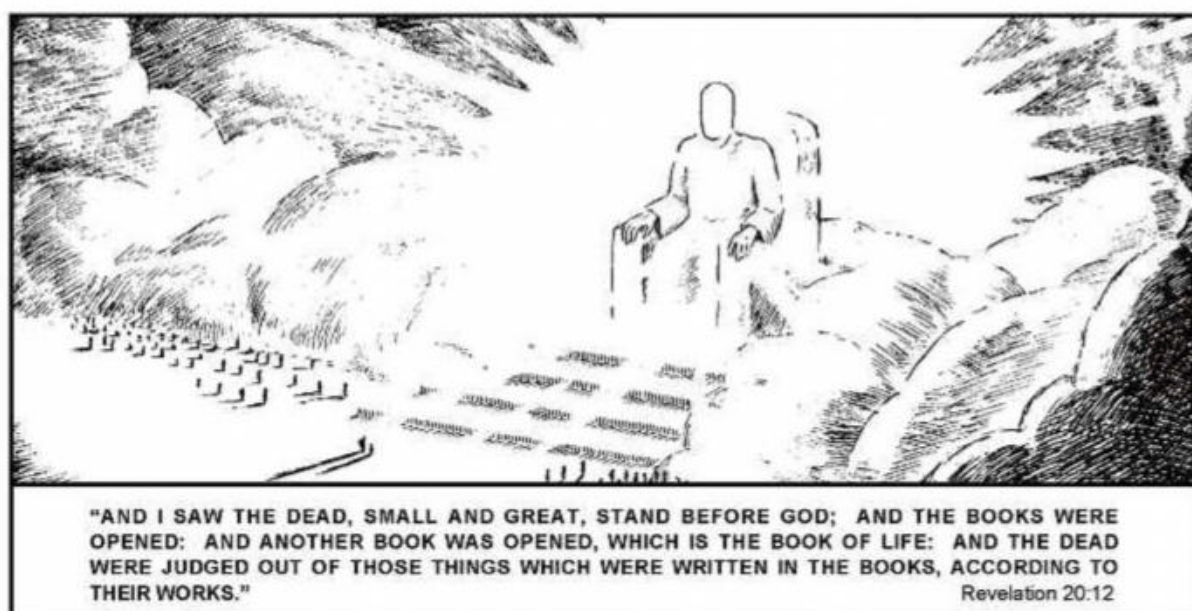
A HEAVENLY WAR

Since Chick saw the world as a clash between cosmic good and evil, it's no surprise to find that he viewed his own work as a battle. He called his office 'The War Room' because, as David Daniels told me, "spiritual warfare takes place there." Subsequently, Chick was keen to present Christianity as a muscular, battle-ready solution to the world's ills. It's seen most clearly in *The Sissy?*, in which a gruff trucker called Duke is convinced that any turn-the-other-cheek Christian must be "a gutless idiot". Until, that is, a hunky Christian man describes how truly hardcore the crucifixion was ("It cut his muscles and blood vessels to shreds!"). A totally ripped Jesus is shown on the cross, and Duke converts right there in the Truck Stop – because "Jesus had more guts than any man that ever lived... and I love him for that!"

Chick didn't see believers as weaklings: they were warriors, heading into spiritual battle, and naturally the war brought personal danger too. He wrote *The Last Call* (one of his earlier tracts) in his lunch and coffee breaks at work and kept the manuscript in his car; when the vehicle burst into flames, he saw it as a spiritual attack. Yet the Lord had his back. When the fire was put out, he found that God had "preserved that book" – and through the insurance, he even "reupholstered my car for me." Chick was rumoured to have feared assassination. In time, a less dramatic, but no less tragic spiritual battle came closer to home.

His wife Lola had suffered ill health for many years. She died in 1999 while paramedics tried to revive her on the dining room floor – perhaps the very same room where he and his 'Honey Girl' had created Jack's first ever tracts, a lifetime earlier. Yet it was his daughter, Carol, who fell victim to the very evils Chick had warned of for so long. In the authorised biography, it's revealed that Carol Chick was turned on to witchcraft at high school, was married twice, had an abortion, and became addicted to chemical cocktails which turned her into a wheelchair bound 'wreck'. She eventually died in 2001, before she turned 50. The pages of a Chick Tract had tragically spilled over into his own family life, yet the shy artist with the macho heart wasn't about to give up the battle. He kept writing and designing tracts up until his death on Sunday 23 October 2016 – narrowly missing the chance to do battle with one last Hallowe'en. He was surrounded by his fellow workers, who released a social media statement. The company vowed to carry on his mission: "Our promise to you – Nothing changes; The Method, The Vision, The Purpose."

Chick Publications still thrives today, with new artists taking up the legacy. And with



HTTPS://CHICK.COM/PRODUCTS/TRACT?STK=1



a massive back catalogue of Chick's work, there seems no sign that Chick Tracts will stop appearing.

TOUGH LOVE

Considering that Chick Tracts have been spotted pretty much everywhere, it's ironic that during his life their creator was rarely spotted anywhere. He became something of a recluse and a notorious refuser of interviews. Pictures of him were hard to come by until his death, when his successors started sharing theirs.

His reluctance to be interviewed is no surprise to me; looking at his career – and his many, many tracts – we find a man who wanted to be in control. It's why when talk arose of turning his *Crusaders* comics into a TV show, he refused. I suspect it's also why the tracts never carried paid advertising. In a world filled with demonic conspiracies at the highest level, how could Chick ensure that his message wasn't compromised by relying on outside agencies? He found the answer by focusing on little books of stapled paper sheets that seemed ephemeral; yet the art and ideas they contained had a rare power that still fascinates people today, regardless of their beliefs. The folks at Chick Publications attribute the power of these tracts to the Holy Spirit, moving through the pencil of a man who simply wanted to save us from the forces of darkness. They'd say his motivation was love, not hate.

Yet for others, Chick Tracts can only ever be expressions of prejudice, paranoia and a cruel lack of love. For some, who took a seat in a coffee shop and found a booklet of terror waiting for them, the mere mention of his name brings a chill. One atheist told me that, thanks to Jack Chick, he remains a "mildly paranoid adult". Now that Chick is gone, perhaps we'll never know what really

ABOVE: Compared to Chick's depictions of evil, his God is a bit faceless to say the least. BELOW: *The Sissy?* sees a burly trucker finding Jesus and becoming a hardcore Christian warrior.

drove him – love, intolerance or something in between. Unless of course we get our answer at the end of life, when we tumble into hellfire to discover that the paranoid world of Jack Chick wasn't so paranoid after all. As the demons start tearing out our tongues, we might hear his voice echoing from the distant fields of Heaven, saying: "It didn't have to be this way. I sent you my tracts, but you just didn't listen."

A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO FT READERS, DIRECT FROM CHICK PUBLICATIONS

I asked David Daniels, head of Chick Publications, if he had any special message to pass on to *Fortean Times* readers. Here's what he said:

"This life is temporary. One slip and it's all over. What matters most is eternity. And placing your faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to pay for your sins is the door to the best there is in eternity. And consider whom you are serving. As Jack would say: "If you are not serving the Lord Jesus Christ, you are serving the loser." God bless you all as you consider these things. – David"

To read Chick Tracts, visit www.chick.com to view most in their entirety for free. You can also order a selection pack for a reasonable price. Or of course, you can wait for one to appear under your car's windscreen wiper...

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♦ **PETER LAWS** is an ordained minister with a fascination for the macabre, an author, journalist, film critic, public speaker and FT regular. He is the creator of the Matt Hunter novel series, the latest of which, *Possessed*, will be published in February.

INTO THE DARKLING WOOD

BRIAN STABLEFORD INTERVIEWED

Toward the end of 2019 **DAVID HAMBLING** caught up with the legendary British science fiction writer and talked to him about his long career and prodigious output, the interplay between science fiction and strange phenomena, and even a fictional reporter from *Fortean Times*...

Brian Stableford is a veteran of the British science fiction scene, as author, essayist, translator and editor. Last year saw the half-century of his first book *Cradle of the Sun*, first published in 1969. Despite producing 464 books so far, Stableford regards his output as “rather meagre,” based on Anthony Trollope’s calculation that an author should be able to write at least eight full-length novels a year. (“Trollope was only a part-time writer,” notes Stableford).

Fortean themes suffuse much of his work, including a recent trilogy begun with *Spirits of the Vasty Deep*, set in Wales and featuring (what appear to be) mermaids and sea serpents.

The *Fortean Times* itself has also appeared – in *A Darkling Wood*, the lead character is an entomologist investigating woodland threatened by developers, and is shadowed by an *FT* reporter seeking sensational material. “You can’t have run completely out of ethics working for *Fortean Times*?” demands the exasperated scientist. Of course there really is something nasty in the woods and weird science is involved, inspired by Stableford’s background in biology.

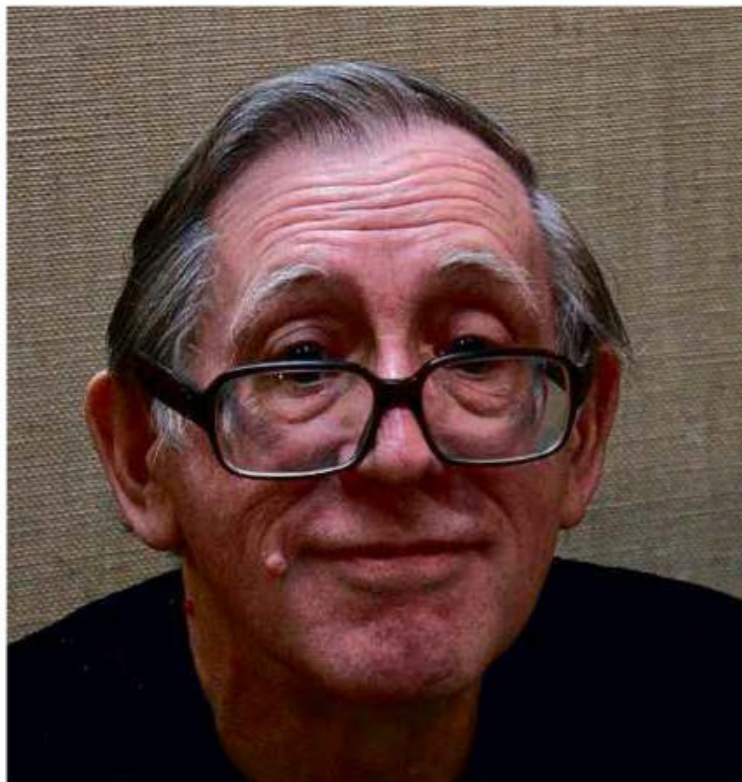
On the way the novel explores one of Stableford’s other interests – ‘scholarly fantasy’, those parts of accepted science where imagination runs ahead of the facts.

Were you ever a reader of *Fortean Times*?

I fear that I only saw the occasional issue of *FT* back in the days when I could still read print fluently, but Bob Rickard [who founded *FT* in 1973] and I used to write for the same fanzine back in the 1960s and I met him once at a science fiction convention.

Hazard, the scientist in *The Darkling Wood*, states that “The truth is dull while scholarly fantasies are colourful.” Is this your own view, or were you setting him up as the character who says: “There are no such thing as vampires...”?

The character is required by the plot to adopt a sceptical stance; my own outlook is also sceptical, in a thoroughgoing sense



“Much of what is real only comes to seem dull when it becomes familiar”

– which is to say that I doubt many things that most sceptics would assume to be true. I take it for granted that most recorded history is misinformation or disinformation, all biography and all psychology being speculative fiction and all autobiography being calculated mendacity. Much physics is probably true, but that doesn’t prevent it being full of scholarly fantasy, without which it could not function.

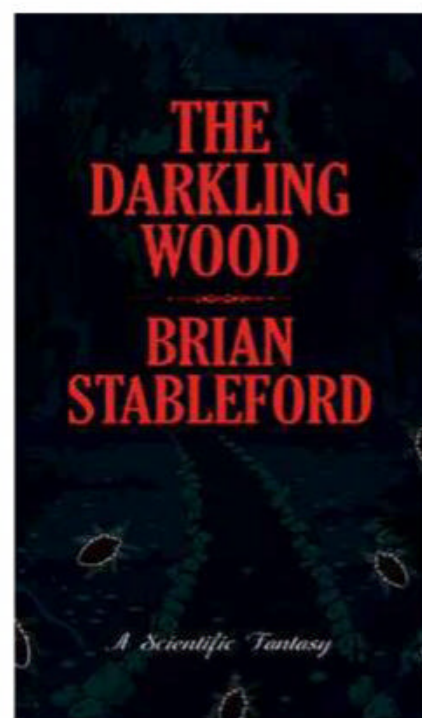
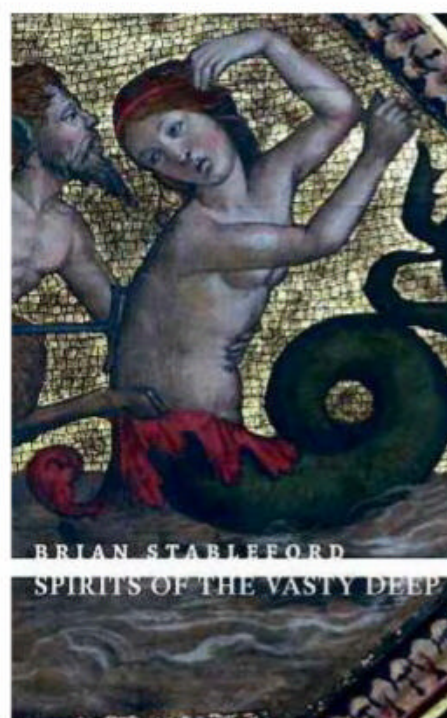
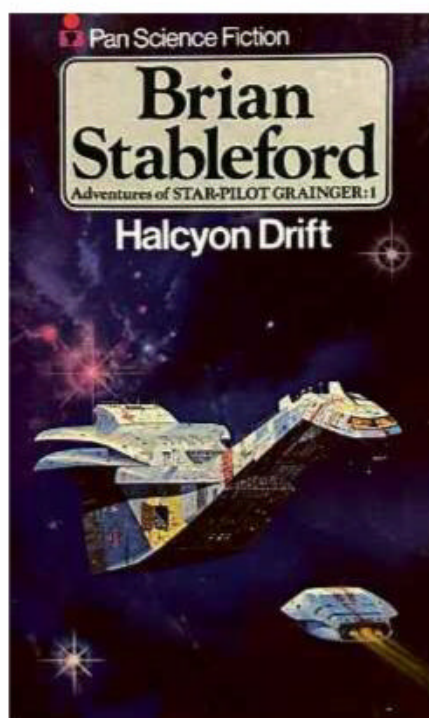
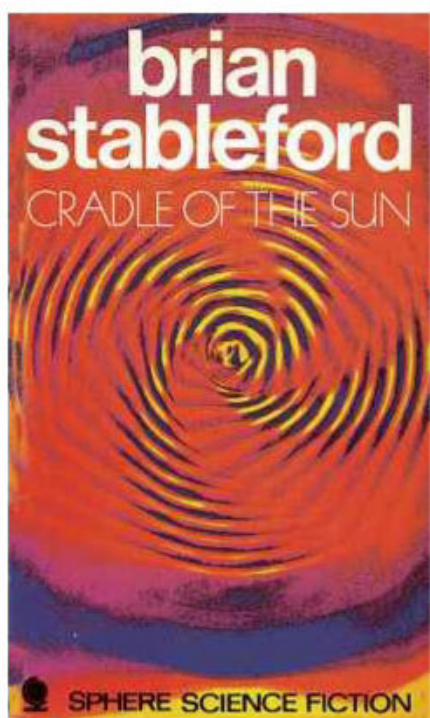
Science might once have been dull, but now we have people like David Attenborough, backed by the formidable apparatus of the BBC Wildlife unit, who can wow the world with intensely colourful visions of the world. Or is the programme just scholarly fantasy with good production values?

Scholarly fantasy often attempts to be more picturesque than the proven reality, but some strives conscientiously to be dull in the hope of seeming more credible. Much of what is real only comes to seem dull when it becomes familiar. David Attenborough is a thoroughly admirable man, a conscientious and enterprising observer on the side of the angels, and his pictures certainly aren’t faked, but the selection made for exhibition and the rhetoric surrounding them in the interests of narrative construction and propaganda obviously introduce a good deal of ideology, the moral and aesthetic judgments of which can neither be true or false.

How would you say science fiction, and our attitudes towards the unexplained, have changed in the decades you’ve been writing?

I’ve always been fascinated by the manner in which literary fantasies, scholarly fantasies and lifestyle fantasies have interacted throughout history, and speculative fiction is a useful way of interrogating those interactions. The “science fiction” label has been adulterated to the extent of meaninglessness, and the written genre seems to have lost the small effect that it might have had in the role of stimulating imagination and thought when I started writing in the 1960s; as for attitudes to the unexplained, most people are philosophically allergic to it and always have been, which is why there’s such a thriving market in aesthetically satisfactory “explanations”.

I think of my own work as “metaphysical fantasy,” which tries to imagine what the world would have to be like in order for various motifs of the imagination actually to exist, and tries to extrapolate other consequences of the hypotheses I come up with. It’s not a game that interests many other people, but I’m an old age pensioner who gets paid just for breathing, and writing occupies the time separating me from the crematorium in a suitably absorbing fashion, which is all I ask of it.



The characters in *Darkling Wood* mention “X-Files Syndrome” – the way evidence of strangeness vanishes at the end of each episode. And of course it strikes in the book... are phenomena in biology sometimes frustratingly elusive in real life?

By “X-files Syndrome” I meant to refer to a problem of narrative construction that afflicts series fiction in which there is an assumed responsibility to leave the fictitious world essentially unchanged, in order to aid the reader/viewer in the pretence that the world-within-the-text is the lived-in world. Biological phenomena can be very elusive, though, because they suffer terribly from the uncertainty principle. Being active, biological systems tend to be affected by the process of observation – the discoveries of microscopy, for instance, have always been haunted by artefacts introduced by the preparation of slides. In the human sciences, of course, almost all behaviour is a product of being observed, scientifically or otherwise, just as most “news” only happens in order to be reported.

What do you think would happen in a situation like the one in the book’s *Tenebrion Wood* in real life – would there be a proper scientific investigation, or would the story only make it to the pages of *Fortean Times*?

In real life, an essentially elusive phenomenon like the one featured in the story would be very difficult to investigate, as the observations Hazard is able to make are difficult to share with other observers, who would have a lot of latitude to interpret them. Most people reject novel observations that don’t fit in with their preconceptions. If only they’d laughed at Galileo he’d have had an easier time of it, but alas, they called him a heretic and put him in prison, in order to defend their fatuous convictions against the evidence. Faith is the deadliest form of mental illness.

It is always difficult to pick favourites, but out of your own ‘metaphysical fantasies’ are

there any favourite speculations that you have particularly enjoyed?

My most enduring fascination has always been the further possibilities of life – the future evolution of life on Earth and the stranger possibilities of life there and elsewhere. My next novel, *The Revelations of Time and Space*, due from Snuggly Books early in 2020, sketches out an entire speculative future for life on Earth and in the Universe, picking up and extrapolating ideas from earlier novels, most significantly *Alien Abduction: The Wiltshire Revelations* (Borgo Press, 2009).

The problem with texts like that, of course, is integrating such extreme ideas into stories with human characters, and linking essentially trivial human problems with the far-reaching notions – which necessarily raises such questions as what relevance our lives could possibly have in the great scheme of things. If I’ve achieved anything in my career as an SF writer, that’s where the achievement lies – or where the ambition lay, at least.

In the past, biology was a fruitful field for scholarly fantasy – dragons, sea serpents, mermaids and the elusive yeti. Is this a field that might still produce some surprises?

Biology has indeed been a fruitful field for scholarly fantasy, and still is, including but not limited to the fascinations of cryptozoology. I certainly hope that there might be more genuine surprises in store as we learn more about the diversity of life on Earth – to which, of course, we might be able to make contributions of our own.

We appear to be entering an era where experts are ignored and scepticism about science is at an all-time high. Would you agree with this, and where do you see us going next?

I don’t think that scepticism regarding science is at an all-time high; my acquaintance with the speculative literature

of the past suggests that it’s always been strong and stubborn. Nobody, including scientists, ever wants to be confused by an inconvenient truth when they’ve already made up their mind, and the natural reaction to having your prejudices challenged is to dig your heels in.

One problem with contemporary science is that the truth has turned out, on conscientious investigation, to be very complicated and really rather odd, defying “common sense” in many different ways. Thus, a blanket denial of its pretensions becomes psychologically attractive to many people, just as exaggerated faith in science becomes psychologically attractive to those who think they can and do understand it – thus the argument tends to become polarised. As to where we’re heading next, we’re heading for disaster – everybody knows that apart from professional liars and optimists.

Your writings have covered an astonishing half-century of scientific development, from the first man on the Moon to the cyber era, a period which has also been a remarkable one for speculative fiction. Would you see it as a golden age, or is it all subjective?

I don’t know about a “Golden Age” – tricky notion – but the last half-century has certainly seen spectacular developments in science and technology that have changed the world more in a few decades than all the previous centuries contrived to do. In my youth, when the microchip had yet to be invented, the possibilities now inherent in electronic technology were literally unimaginable, and nobody could begin to foresee what possibilities might develop from the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA and the subsequent “cracking” of the genetic code. Those two areas of discovery have helped to promote a spectacular leap in social evolution, whose consequences will continue to unfold for a while yet, until we contrive the collective suicide that we are all trying so hard to commit...

BRIDES, BRIDGES AND SPACEMEN

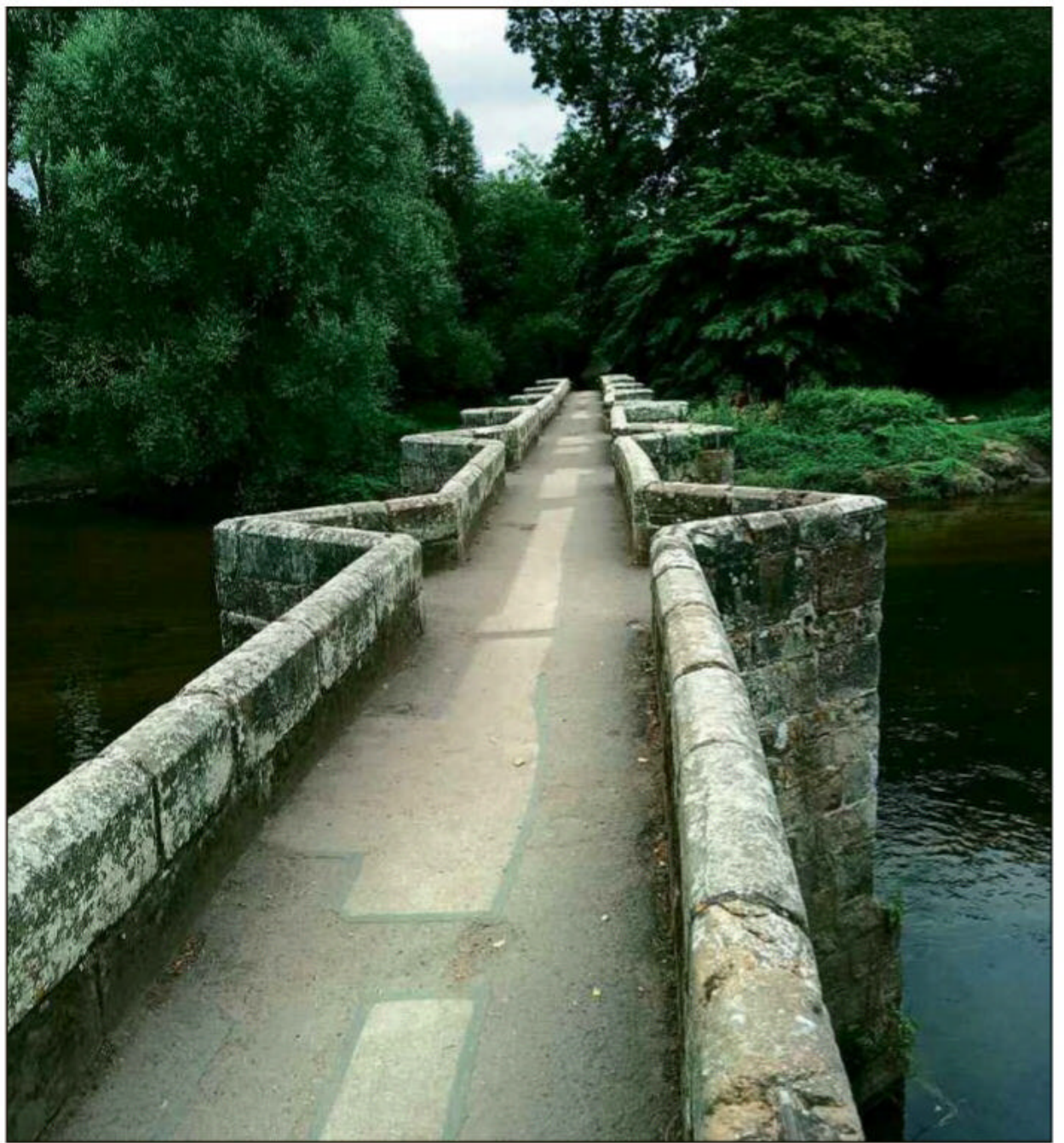
ROB GANDY returns with more real-life experiences from Cheshire and Staffordshire, including a bevy of ghostly brides falling from bridges, a disintegrating jogger and a spaceman on a high-tech motorcycle who may have been a ghost from the future...

In my article *Strange Stories from Southport* (FT370:42-45) I highlighted how, following my *Old Man of Halsall Moss* (FT328:32-39) presentation in Birkdale, several people told me of their own weird experiences, which I included in said article. However, one tale was excluded because it was not local to West Lancashire and required more research because it seemed so fantastic. This was the second experience described to me by Miss W, who also gave the details of Case J (the Drunken Farmer). I am now at a point where I cannot take things any further, and so I set out her story below, together with other 'real-life' experiences collected during the course of my investigations in the Cheshire-Staffordshire borders.

THE BRIDE ON THE BRIDGE

Miss W of Formby, Merseyside, was in a car being driven back from Alton Towers in North Staffordshire after a day visiting the amusement park. There were two cars, a boy and a girl in each, with Miss W being the passenger in the front car. It was late one summer evening – Miss W recalls that it was getting on for 9pm on either 13 or 14 August in (probably) 2008. Her friend Chris had decided to drive on the back roads to avoid major road works. The weather was clear, although there may have been some drizzle in the air.

They had been travelling for 20 to 30 minutes and were driving up a narrow two-way road when they approached a bridge. The bridge had waist-high brick walls on either side, and was little more than a single-car's width over a canal or small river. They then saw a woman in a wedding dress standing on the right-hand side of the bridge; just as they were driving carefully past her, she fell over the side of the bridge. Miss W said to Chris that he must have hit her, but Chris insisted that he had not. They stopped and got out and looked over the bridge, down what appeared to be a 12-15ft (3.6-4.6m) drop. There was nothing to see – no sign of the woman or anything else.



ROB GANDY

“Then they saw a lady in a wedding dress standing on the bridge”

ABOVE: The Essex Bridge at Great Haywood, Staffordshire.

They called out but got no response.

Their friends in the other car had been right behind them. However, because they were travelling in an unfamiliar area, they had been concentrating on the road. Given the speed with which events unfolded, they both knew that they had seen something, but were uncertain as to exactly what. They



ROB GANDY

ABOVE: A bridge over the brook at Sandbach Heath, just to the north of St John the Evangelist Church, which is visible in the background. **BELOW:** Blue Bell Hill in north Kent is home to a notorious road ghost linked to the death of a bride-to-be in 1965. The story was told by Sean Tudor in *FT* in November 1997.

stopped the car and joined Miss W and Chris who described what had happened. They all tried to call for the police and an ambulance on their mobiles, only to find that there was no signal. They decided that Miss W and Chris should drive on to find somewhere where they could find a telephone, or get a signal, while the friends stayed by the bridge to wait and see if they could find the woman. After about three minutes Miss W and Chris came across a rather isolated, moderately-sized public house – Miss W thinks that it could have accommodated about 50 people. The pub car park was not very large and most cars were parked on the road. Beyond the pub were a number of houses. Miss W and Chris stopped and entered.

They asked for a telephone and described what had happened. They were greeted by a deathly silence. The landlady then explained that what they had seen was the ghost of a woman called ‘Sarah’ who had fallen off the bridge and drowned on her wedding day 25 years previously. She had been wearing her wedding dress. The phantom had been witnessed every year on the anniversary. Miss W and Chris were naturally shocked. In the circumstances, accepting what they had been told, they decided not to call the police or ambulance. They returned to their friends before setting off on the remainder of their journey to Merseyside.



This is a very intriguing story, particularly as many aspects potentially sound folkloric: an anniversary ghost, appearing every year for 25 years; the ghost is that of a bride; and, a remote pub where everyone is familiar with the ghost. There are some parallels with the famous Blue Bell Hill ghost, in Kent, where a bride-to-be was killed in a car crash on the eve of her wedding day

(see **FT73:28, 104:36-40**). I have pressed Miss W about the various details, and she is wholly sincere about her experience. Indeed, during our various correspondences, she met her friend Lucy from the second car, who corroborated the story. Therefore, it appears to be a genuine, first-hand multi-witness experience. Unfortunately, Miss W cannot remember sufficient details to enable identification of the bridge and pub. She recalls there were no traffic lights on the bridge and no other bridges, such as over a railway, were nearby.

I pursued several different approaches in my follow-up investigation. I contacted *FT*'s Alan Murdie to ask if the Ghost Club¹ had anything of relevance in its records. Alan was his usual helpful self, but unfortunately nothing was found. I also liaised with fellow *Weird Weekend North* presenter Mike Walters, who lives in the Stoke-on-Trent area [**FT355:24**]. Mike has a good knowledge of all strange phenomena in the area and excellent contacts. He put the word out throughout his network, seeking related information, but also drew a blank. Nevertheless, he provided details of some other stories below.

I tried identifying potential locations on Google Maps and Street View, but failed to identify any bridges where the locations and descriptions fitted the details provided; it is unlikely I covered all possibilities. I then



ABOVE: The lychgate of St John the Evangelist, Sandbach Heath, where 'Garth' saw a misty, white figure.

used my tried-and-tested method of asking local newspapers to include a short article outlining the experience in question and inviting readers to get in touch with me if they had related information to offer.² This exercise yielded one experience relating to a ghostly bride (see below). It should be noted that no newspaper could trace an article from its back-issue records from the early 1980s (where they existed) reporting on a bride called 'Sarah' who drowned by falling off a bridge on her wedding day. I feel certain such an occurrence would have definitely appeared in the local press, if not the national papers.

THE BRIDE ON THE HEATH

I only received one response to my call for information through local newspapers. This was from Mr G, who is now retired and

A person-shaped white mist crossed the road and went through the gate

was born and bred in the Sandbach area of Cheshire. He remembers the story that his grandmother told him in the 1940s about a local church that is haunted by the ghost of a bride. The story goes that there is a white apparition that has been seen crossing the road from the opposite side to the church, through the lychgate and into the

churchyard. This is supposed to be the ghost of a bride who died just before her wedding day and was buried in her wedding dress in the churchyard.

Mr G says that the story is well known locally. He thinks his grandmother was born in the 1880s, and told the story as if it were both well-known and had been around for a long time, which suggests that it could possibly pre-date World War I. The church is St John the Evangelist Church at Sandbach Heath, which is sometimes referred to simply as 'The Heath'. The building was designed by George Gilbert Scott, and is situated in a comparatively isolated position on Church Lane, which runs south off the Congleton Road (A534), just east of junction 17 of the M6. A little way to the north of the church, before the A534, there is a valley with a small bridge over a brook that is a tributary of the River Wheelock.

Mr G has never seen the apparition himself, but recalls that during the 1980s he was attending an educational course as part of his work on the railways when he was approached by a colleague (he can only remember the man's nickname of 'Garth') who told him a story. Garth and his wife had been walking in the area around The Heath with a group of friends the previous weekend. It was dusk as they walked up the lane on which St John the Evangelist Church stands; the weather was dry. Garth and his wife had dropped back some distance from the main group, and their friends had all gone past the church entrance. It was at this point that the two of them saw a person-shaped white mist cross the road in front of them and go through the lychgate. Terrified, they quickly caught up with the main group. Garth had sought Mr G's confirmation about the reputed haunting because of his knowledge of the local area. Neither Garth nor his wife knew of it before the event took place and so there can be no question of prior suggestion.

I contacted St John the Evangelist Church and spoke to the current warden, who was born locally and has lived in the area all his life, some 60 years. He was aware of the story of a ghost in a white gown but neither he nor anyone else that he knows has ever actually seen anything; and he has spent a great deal of time over the years, in the day and at night, undertaking duties in the church and churchyard. He considers it simply an old tale passed down over time. I asked whether there might be a woman who had been buried in her wedding dress, but he was not aware of any evidence that such an event had occurred; the only option would be to go through the Diocese records in Chester. I did not feel that I could justifiably ask anyone to do this, particularly as any records were unlikely to note the apparel of the deceased, who of course would have arrived at the church in a closed coffin. I therefore thanked the warden for his time and advice, and drew a line under this avenue of research.

It will have been noted that there is a bridge near the church, and one inevitable question is whether this might be the one where Miss W and her friends had their own experience years later. I strongly believe that this is not the case: the location is undoubtedly more than 20 to 30 minutes from Alton Towers; the bridge is over a brook which is not 12ft (3.6m) below; the road goes down to, rather than up to, the bridge; and while the Chimney House Hotel is nearby, it in no way fits Miss W's description of the public house. The fact that the location is between a quarter and a half mile from Junction 17 of the M6 motorway is also significant: the direction of the roads and lanes mean this is not a route that Miss W and her friends would have been likely to travel; the proximity of the motorway makes it unlikely there was a mobile phone black spot; and Miss W does not recall a motorway being nearby. Therefore, although Mr G's story is fascinating in itself, it does not refer to the same phenomenon and location as Miss W's experience.

THE CONFETTI JOGGER

Around 6.30am one day in early November 2017, Alison Graham, aged 44, of Whitehill in Staffordshire, was travelling from Thorncliffe towards the Mermaid Inn on the Staffordshire Moorlands. There was fog, so thick she could only see a few yards ahead. Therefore she drove cautiously at less than 20mph (32kmh). As she passed the lay-by before the Mermaid, a jogger suddenly came out of nowhere, on the same side of the road, running away from her. She described him as "very tall, slim and wearing dark clothes with reflective material to the bottom of his top and on the back of his running shoes." She hit the brakes hard and gripped the steering wheel tightly, as the car inevitably slid towards him. Then, on the point of impact, "He disintegrated. Like confetti." It was as if he had turned into small pieces of paper right before her eyes. But then he was gone, leaving Alison "shocked, amazed and terrified all in equal quantities". She stopped the car and checked the road behind her, but found nothing other than the thick fog.³

Dawn Myatt told of a similar experience driving alone on the M6 one night from Stafford towards Stoke-on-Trent. It was around 9.30pm and still light, with little traffic. Suddenly she saw a man in the middle of the motorway, wearing a denim jacket, jeans and check shirt, with collar-length wavy dark blonde hair, like someone from the early 1970s. He started to walk just before she hit him but she felt nothing. She pulled over but there was no one there. Nita Reynolds added that "there is a stretch of the M6 that's well known for hauntings" and described this as being around Junction 17.⁴

SPACEMAN ON A MOTORBIKE

It was during my discussions with Mike Walters that he alerted me to a motorbike



ABOVE: Keele Bank, outside Newcastle-under-Lyme, where Mike Walters's father saw the 'spaceman'.

story told to him by a friend, also called Mike. Unfortunately, it was too late for inclusion in my *Uneasy Riders* article about road ghosts on motorbikes (FT358:42-47).

One day in the 1950s or 1960s Mike's father was roughly halfway up the very steep part of Keele Road (known locally as Keele Bank), just outside Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. It was mid to late evening and dark, that stretch of the road being unlit. His father was on foot and doing some poaching, and was therefore trying to be as discreet as possible. Just then he heard a strange mechanical roaring sound coming from down the hill, from the Newcastle direction, and saw a motorbike approaching him, much quicker than he would have expected. He was struck by the number of lights, which were much brighter than typical motorcycle lights of that time. Mike's father was scared but continued to stare at what he described as a 'Spaceman' on a very strange, streamlined motorbike; indeed, he wasn't 100 per cent sure it *was* a motorbike until it went past. He described the rider as wearing a sort of one-piece suit and a massive streamlined helmet with a mirrored visor, which he later said resembled a space helmet. The 'Spaceman' glanced in his direction but did not stop; the motorbike just roared past on its way up the bank. Once it was out of sight, Mike's father decided it was time to return home. He later told Mike what he had seen, and the story became well known in the family.

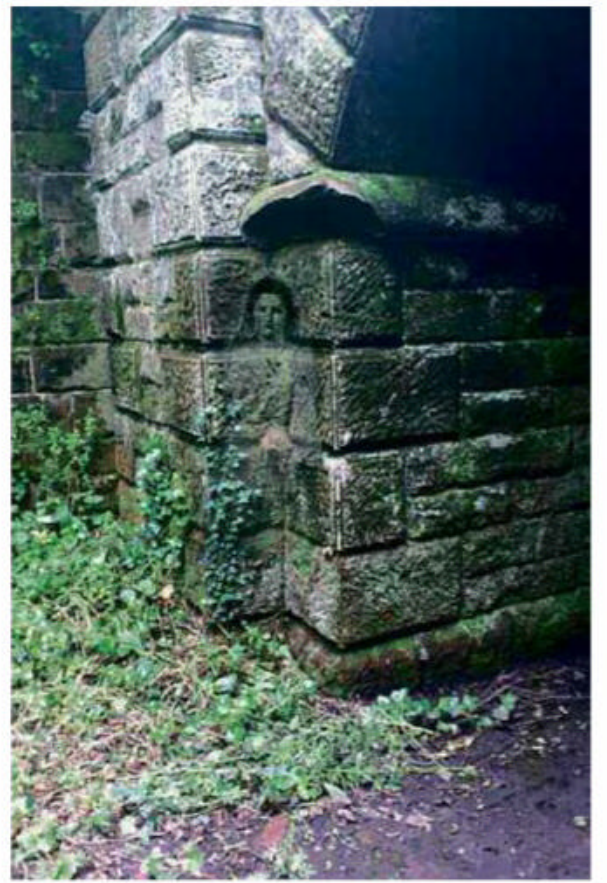
Many years later, probably around the Millennium, Mike was riding up Keele Bank on his modern motorbike when he found himself approaching the spot where his father told him he'd seen the 'Spaceman'. As he passed the spot he got an uncontrollable urge to look to the side of the road, as if half-expecting to see his father, who had long since passed away. He was disappointed, but unsurprised, to see the roadside was empty. However, he then realised that it was

mid to late evening and he was dressed in an outfit which was exactly the same as his father had described all those years before. In addition, his motorbike was a big, powerful, modern machine, with bright lights and a distinct roaring sound. As he looked down at his one-piece bike leathers he remembered he was also wearing a mirrored visor helmet. A powerful feeling swept over him that evening, one that he could not shake. He said: "What if what my father saw on that night all those years ago was me as I am now?" To this day Mike believes that this might have been the case: somehow, in the 1950s or 1960s, his father had seen his own middle-aged son go past him on his motorbike – perhaps a ghost from the future...

EMILY

In March 2019 I gave a presentation about road ghosts to Mike Walter's Newcastle-under-Lyme-based *Mysteries* group. Members of the group had made great effort to identify where Miss W's experience had taken place, both by visiting potential locations north of Stoke-on-Trent and checking Google-based sources. Frustratingly they had drawn a complete blank. The following month I gave a presentation at *Weird Weekend North 2019* (FT381:22-23) which included the above cases. Much to my surprise I was approached by people from the audience who said that they knew someone who had also seen a 'ghost bride' in Staffordshire, but to the south of Stoke-on-Trent – an area not closely investigated by the *Mysteries* group. They agreed to put this person in touch with me. I hoped that this might prove a second and confirmatory case of the same phantom, which would help specify the location involved and thereby lead to further enquiries.

I was eventually contacted by Karen (pseudonym) who told me that she was



ABOVE: The canal bridge at Great Haywood, where 'Steve' says he sensed a presence and took the photograph that later revealed 'Emily' (above right).

not the one who'd had the experience in question; that had been her friend Steve (pseudonym), who described the incident as follows:

"It was the afternoon of Sunday 29 July 2012 and I had been to the Great Haywood village shop. I was walking through the woods with my dog Tilly; we had passed St Stephen's church and were heading towards the canal where the narrow boats are moored. As we passed underneath the railway bridge – just before the iron bridge that goes over the Trent and Mersey canal – I caught sight of something out of the corner of my eye. I turned around to see who it was, thinking it was someone else out walking their dog, but no one was there. Indeed, there was no one around at

all. Nevertheless, it felt like someone was there in front of me, and that I was being watched. I have had many experiences like this before, where I sensed a presence. So, using my mobile phone, I decided to take a photograph of the area by the wall of the railway bridge where I sensed someone to be. It was only when I returned home and looked at the photo that I was shocked to clearly see the image of a young woman in front of the wall. She was looking directly at me, and I considered that she looked startled, even though the image was quite transparent. She appeared to be wearing a veil around her head and carrying a small posy of flowers. (I checked and where a 'posy' is situated on the image there was nothing in the actual wall that could have been mistaken for one). I thought she looked around 23 years old,

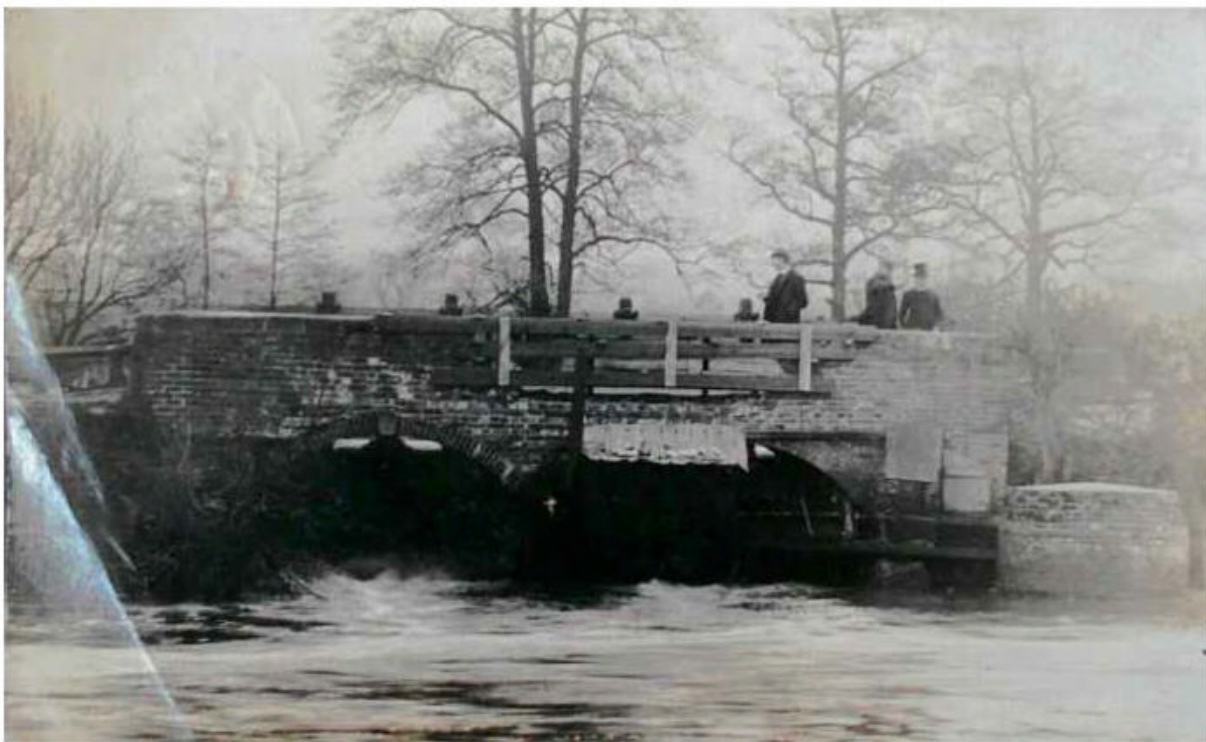
although she could be younger. I named her 'Emily' as that is the name that came to me when I saw her.

I showed the photo to my friend Karen, who lives locally, hoping that she might shed some light on who this woman might be. She speculated there could be a link to a young woman who was the victim of a fatal road traffic accident that happened in Great Haywood at the Mill Pond in 1905, where a car had come off the road into the pond.

Interestingly, Tilly did not react at the time of the incident, as some dogs can do where there is something 'paranormal' going on. By contrast, my older dog Bess, when she was alive, often went 'nuts' whenever we walked by the railway bridge and in the woods close by. Once, she just refused to pass by a particular spot in the woods and barked and growled at something that I couldn't see; I ended up having to climb the embankment and walk across the top to the other side!

Karen later shared Steve's photo with a local Facebook group. One response was from an elderly gentleman who has lived in the village all his life. He said that he recognised this young woman and had often seen her crossing over the nearby Essex Bridge towards Shugborough Hall in the evenings when he was out walking his dog. She had passed him and then simply vanished.

The reference to the road traffic accident relates to Mrs Challenor, the wife of the Town Clerk of Hanley, and her niece, who were being driven across the bridge at Great Haywood Mill when their car plunged into the mill pond. The chauffeur and Mrs Challenor survived, but Mrs Challenor's niece could not be found. The pond was dragged and divers from the Manchester Ship Canal were brought in,



ABOVE: The Mill Pond Bridge at Great Haywood seen on a postcard sent in 1905. The message on the reverse reads: "This is the fatal spot at Gt Haywood. The body has not been recovered up to present."



ABOVE: The Essex Bridge at Great Haywood, where a witness claims to have regularly encountered a young woman resembling 'Emily'.

but without success. Eventually the mill pond was pumped dry, but the body was only recovered downstream three weeks later. After the accident the road was straightened and a new bridge was built.⁵

What to make of all this? Well, it is clear that the descriptions of the place, the 'bride' and the experience are quite different to those of Miss W and her Formby friends. Steve sensed someone *under* a bridge whereas the 'bride' seen by Miss W was *on top* of one; one bridge relates to a railway and the other involves a watercourse; one location is close by a large village while the other is out in the countryside; and Great Haywood, being six miles east of Stafford and 18 miles south of Stoke-on-Trent, would represent a not impossible but highly unlikely route for the Formby party to have taken travelling home from Alton Towers, even if they were a bit lost. Inevitably some will question Steve's photograph. I am no expert in photography and will accept that the image looks a bit like a two-dimensional superimposition of one photograph on to another. But, as most critics will be sceptics who do not believe in ghosts, the question must be asked: what exactly does a photograph of a genuine ghost look like if ghosts don't exist anyway? I adopt the fortean stance of keeping an open mind and simply present the evidence for others to debate.

However, I must stress that I believe in both Steve's and Karen's sincerity; neither has sought publicity or gain from the photograph, and I only stumbled across it through a chain of events and contacts. The fact that the elderly gentleman (a) recognised the woman from the photograph, and (b) indicated that he had regularly seen her on Essex Bridge simply adds grist to the

mill. Of course, even if it is believed that the image is that of a ghost there can be no certainty as to the person involved. Maybe it is Mrs Challenor's niece (given the location is about 650 yards downstream from the mill pond), or a servant from Shugborough Hall, or even a jilted bride. Sadly we will never know – but 'Emily' is a nice name for her, whoever or whatever she is.

CONCLUSIONS

I don't think that we will ever get to the bottom of what happened to Miss W and her friends that evening unless we can identify the specific location. It could be that they mistook a mist (or similar) for being a bride on the bridge, given that mists can form around watercourses in certain conditions. What may appear solid from a distance can then become more dispersed as you approach, potentially leading to the conclusion that 'it' has disappeared. Also they were travelling in a general westerly direction at or around sunset, and so it could be that light from the setting sun played tricks with whatever was near to the bridge, such as trees or bushes, which might then have combined with any mist that was present. The friends then rationalised the disappearance of the optical phenomena as being the bride falling over the side.

But what of the reaction and response from the people in the pub? I believe that there are three possibilities: they were telling the truth (but then why wasn't the story of 'Sarah's' demise reported in the press?); they were familiar with a local (atmospheric/weather) phenomenon relating to the bridge which had developed into a ghost story that they liked to tell to passing travellers; or they were simply 'having a laugh'. The landlady would not

have had to ask the *League of Gentlemen's* question "Are you local?" when two panicking Merseyside youngsters arrived with their outlandish tale. Why not humour them with a story made up on the spot? None of the regulars, enjoying the fun, would contradict her. Of course, this is pure speculation on my part, deliberately adopting a sceptical stance, and building hypothesis upon hypothesis upon hypothesis in a fortean house of cards. All that I can say is that Miss W and her friends sincerely believed they had their experience, which is reinforced by their subsequent actions in seeking help.

The existence of the photograph of 'Emily' and the claim that this spirit, or whatever it might be, has been seen regularly on Essex Bridge over many years makes the Great Haywood case particularly intriguing. Other photographs have been taken close to where the event took place with orbs being spotted; although orbs are usually dismissed as photographic artefacts. What can definitely be stated is that this is a completely different case to that witnessed by Miss W and her friends. Which begs the question of whether there is some connection between 'brides' and bridges, particularly in Cheshire and Staffordshire. We will never know the answer, but these 'brides' can be added to the panoply of White ladies and haunted bridges described by Alan Murdie (FT358:18-20).

These first- and second-hand stories are good examples of forteana from this part of England, and illustrate how the pursuit of one investigation can generate other interesting tales, even if the investigation itself proves less than fruitful. Of course, there may be folkloric elements in such tales, which is why it is so important to get as near to the source(s) as possible. But I am left with the comforting thought that serendipity can be a key factor in fortean research.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Alan Murdie and Mike Walters for their time, efforts and advice.

NOTES

- 1 www.ghostclub.org.uk/
- 2 I would like to thank the Cheadle Post & Times, the Congleton Chronicle, the Leek Post & Times, the Stoke Sentinel, and the Uttoxeter Post & Times, for doing this.
- 3 <http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/local-news/supernatural-staffordshire-i-ran-over-851860>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 www.search.staffspastrack.org.uk/details.aspx?ResourceID=597&ExhibitionID=599&SearchType=2&ThemeID=26#top

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IF YOU'RE HAPPY AND YOU KNOW IT, BOMB KOREA

In the first of two reports, **SD TUCKER** meets some very Happy Chappies who aim to spread joy and peace worldwide – by preparing Japan for nuclear war on the advice of famous ghosts.

Japan's most persistent electoral candidate is surely TV star Yoshiro Nakamatsu, aka 'Dr NakaMats', who claims to be the world's greatest inventor on the basis of his (purported) design of the floppy disk in 1952. Among his other creations are a perpetual-motion machine, a pair of 'Invisible Glasses' shaped like human eyes, and the 'PyonPyon Jumping Shoes', which allow even the most flat-footed of assailants to impersonate Spring-heeled Jack with ease. The winner of a 2005 IgNobel Prize, NakaMats credits his 4,000-plus patents to the risky method of immersing himself underwater until only "0.5 seconds from death", the lack of oxygen proving a spur to his grey matter. Arguing in his book *Invention of Politics and How to Become a Superman Lying Down* that politics itself is an "invisible invention", he has been fruitlessly bouncing for high office since 1995.

In 2010 and 2013, Nakamatsu chose to fly the banner of the new Happiness Realisation Party (HRP), dressing as a Tibetan Buddhist monk in honour of the HRP's founder... who claims to be Buddha himself. Both Dr NakaMats and the HRP share a profound concern about Japan's falling birthrate. NakaMats once sold a RoboCop-friendly condom with a magnet inside to enhance penile pleasure, but now prefers to market his 'Love Jet' fluid, a stimulating perfume for the genitals intended to "save Japan" from impending demographic doom.¹ This is also the aim of 'Master' Ryuho Okawa, who founded the HRP as an offshoot of his Happy Science (*Kofuku-no-Kagaku*) religious movement in 2009, the difference being that he aims to achieve such an outcome via a unique blend of nuclear re-armament, open-door immigration, free-market economics and communication with the dead.

THE HAPPIEST HUMAN IN THE HUMAN RACE

Happy Science (HS) was founded by Okawa in 1986, following an ecstatic experience termed 'The Great Enlightenment'. According to a full hagiography on the HS website, Okawa (who had read 1,000 books by the age of 20) began as an employee of the "major trading company" Tomen in



LEFT: Yoshiro Nakamatsu demonstrates his amazing 'PyonPyon Jumping Shoes'.

HIS PREVIOUS INCARNATIONS INCLUDE HERMES AND BUDDHA

their New York offices, where, in the Twin Towers, he developed a twin regard for the ostensibly unrelated spheres of free-market capitalism and New Age spirituality. On 23 March 1981, during a rare break from work, the 24-year-old Okawa suddenly sensed an "invisible presence" and grabbed a pencil. Then, he said: "My hand holding the pencil began to move as if it had a life of its own. On card after card it wrote the words *Good News, Good News, Good News...*" The Good News was that he was Buddha reborn. Rather than renouncing all worldly goods, this time around Buddha continued to grease the wheels of global commodity-exchange until, on 17 June 1986, "high spirits came down one after another from the heavenly world" to advise a career-change. Okawa handed in his notice and "stood up alone for the

salvation of all humanity at the expense of his personal life". By that October, HS had been founded, and was legally certified as a religious movement – and thus, officially not a cult – in Japan in March 1991. Prior to this, it preferred to pose as being simply "a graduate school for life".

If you think Okawa's claim to have read over 1,000 books is impressive, just consider that he has *written* over 2,500! In 2011, he made Guinness World Records after publishing 52 titles – one per week – during the previous year. By 2014, even this seemed lazy, with 161 tomes hitting shelves. Many Japanese bookstores maintain a special 'Okawa Corner' where fans can peruse his works in a variety of formats. Some books have become bestsellers, with his early work *The Laws of the Sun* shifting a million copies. Admittedly, Okawa has had a little help in penning them, as most were channelled down from discarnate spirits, gods and aliens. One entity from which Okawa has drawn inspiration is El Cantare, described as "God of the Earth" and "The Tree of Life" – namely, God Himself. El Cantare is the ultimate source of every Earth religion, and plans to reunite all faiths in His worship, as He revealed to Okawa upon the day of the minor Sun god Emperor Hirohito's death in 1989. Rarely, El Cantare allows His "core consciousness" to inhabit a human body in the form of an avatar; previous incarnations have included Hermes in ancient Greece and, 2,500 years ago, Gautama Buddha in India and Nepal. Gautama was El Cantare's last incarnation prior to 1956, when Master Okawa was (re)born.² But why is Buddha now promoting the free-market?

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE

Okawa bills himself as "CEO of the Happy Science Group", which follows the traditional management structure of a large Japanese corporation. Photos show a well-groomed, presentable *salaryman* type in smart suit and tie, not a semi-naked, long-bearded guru. In 1991, a piece of prime Tokyo real-estate was acquired for the HS HQ, thereby

HARUMI OKAWA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: The Happiness Realisation Party leader Jikido Aeba shakes hands with Kyoko Okawa, wife of the founder Ryuho Okawa. ABOVE RIGHT: A happy Ryuho Okawa.

displaying the Happies' economic strength as "manifest proof" of Okawa's sacred nature; in materialistic early-1990s Japan, high financial status equated to high spiritual status, and many recruits were essentially Japanese yuppies. Unlike most religions, HS had a business-plan. When targets for expansion were met, they suddenly became recast as successful 'prophecies' on The Master's behalf, in a reversal of politicians' usual tactic of abandoning unmet targets as mere 'aspirations'. Okawa's ultimate aim is to convert the entire world.

It was originally quite hard to join HS: hopeful applicants had to read "at least" 10 of Okawa's books and then write a tough essay, but these exams later became multiple-choice, with the new chance to win cash prizes attached; now even these have been abandoned. Okawa has built a rich, professional international organisation with a claimed 12 million members worldwide, who gather at temples called 'Happy Science Shojas' – "town squares of the soul" and "lighthouses shining Heaven's light to the surrounding areas", no less – to recite sutras from Okawa's books and arrange charity work. Here, a practice known as 'Happiness Planting' takes place – the soliciting of financial donations, or, if you prefer, donations of your free time instead. These are voluntary, as with church collection-plates, but carry echoes of Okawa's previous career in finance. There is such a thing as 'seed-capital', in which investors give money to start-up businesses in hope of seeing them grow, thus contributing to the expansion of both the wider economy and the investor's own bank balance. Happiness Planting looks similar. By donating money to them, the Happies say, "not only do you contribute to creating more prosperity in this world, but store spiritual wealth and virtue for when

you return back to Heaven. Let us all aim to become angels of wealth."³

If Okawa can work such wonders for the soul, then why not also for the stagnating Japanese economy? Can he magically multiply Yen just as Jesus could loaves and fishes? To find out, Okawa founded his political wing, the HRP, just in time for 2009's General Election. Run initially by his wife Kyoko, whom Okawa said was the earthly incarnation of the goddess Aphrodite (all husbands think that at first), the HRP put forward 345 candidates but failed to land a single MP (although they did get a million votes). Their bizarre manifesto was explained in an interview Okawa gave to the *Japan Times* prior to polling day. Avowedly right-wing in outlook, the HRP aimed to make Japan great again by lowering taxes to stimulate fiscal growth, and reverse population decline by throwing open Japan's borders with the aim of nearly doubling the population to 300 million. If such measures were not taken, then Japan's ageing population would lead it to economic collapse, with too many pensioners for the working-age citizenry to support with taxes. Thus, the HRP wishes to recreate Japan's miraculous 1980s boom-years by imitating the Reaganite policies of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism their High Priest saw working at close-hand during his early days in New York.

UNDIPLOMATIC CHANNELS

Away from economics, the HRP seeks to overcome Japan's "colonial" mentality by revoking Article 9 of the pacifist Japanese constitution, which prevents the country properly re-arming. Japan had to be able to defend herself, Okawa explained, because North Korea's then-dictator, Kim Jong-Il, was preparing to nuke the Imperial Palace

in Tokyo at the behest of China. The HRP released an election video of a mushroom cloud billowing over Tokyo, arguing the urgent need for Japan to develop its own A-bombs as a deterrent against Kim's plans, which Okawa claimed to have heard straight from the horse's mouth... by talking to Kim's ghost.⁴ This seems puzzling, as in 2009 Kim Jong-Il was still alive. However, as Okawa's channelled book *The Guardian Spirit of Kim Jong-Il Speaks* made clear, it was not his ghost *precisely* Okawa quizzed, but an aspect of his soul. As was explained during a 2016 grilling by Okawa of the brain-ghost of the similarly still-animate Donald Trump, it is the view of HS that each person's soul consists of six separate entities termed 'soul siblings', one of whom, the 'Guardian Spirit', lives within (and basically is) our subconscious mind.

Luckily, the highly psychic Okawa is able to access the Spirit Guardians of living world leaders and talk shop about their true intentions. From Trump – "a man whose time has come" – Okawa learned of his fear that large numbers of Muslims allowed into the US together might not integrate well. Trump suggested Japan could accept all Syrian refugees instead, which chimed nicely with the HRP's own liberal immigration policy. Ghost-Donald also endorsed the other key HRP policy of arming Japan with nuclear-tipped ICBMs, rather than the country relying upon the US to defend them from the Kims at great expense.⁵

Okawa can speak to actual dead souls too, the majority of whom also love HRP policies. The Prophet Muhammad, Nelson Mandela, JS Mill, Jesus Christ – all agree with different aspects of the Happy platform, and it was upon the advice of such spirits that Master Okawa entered politics in the first place.⁶ So frequent are his channelled chats that Japan's publishing industry

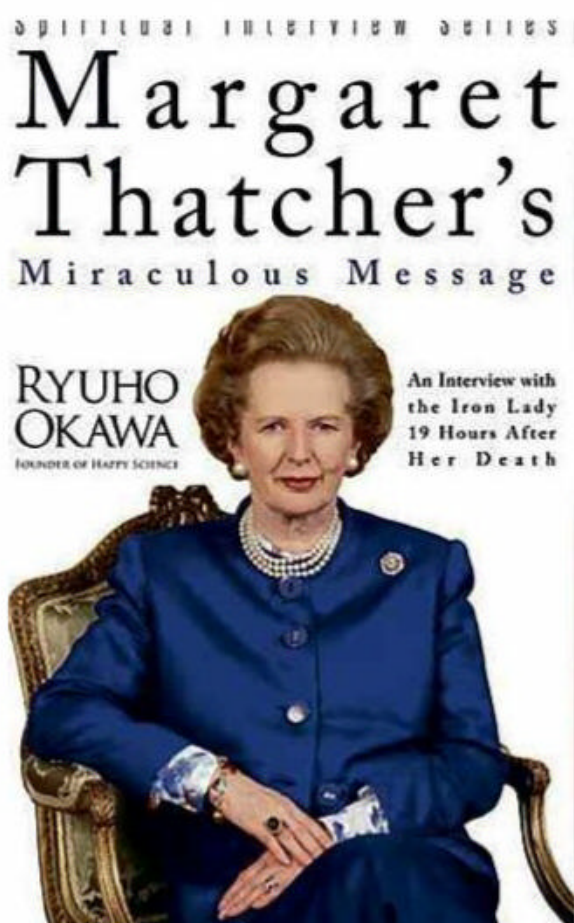


could not keep pace, and HS felt compelled to create its own online newspaper in 2010. Called 'The Liberty Web', it seeks to provide "not only spiritual, but also political, economic and educational advice on a global scale", pointing "the direction in which this confused and drifting planet should go." What this amounts to is rather like a surprisingly pro-immigrant Japanese *Daily Mail*, as written by Spiritualists. I agree with editor Jiro Ayaori's desire to prove that "Marxist income-distribution and a controlled economy produce nothing but poverty", but would not choose to prove this by running interviews with like-minded ghosts. ⁷

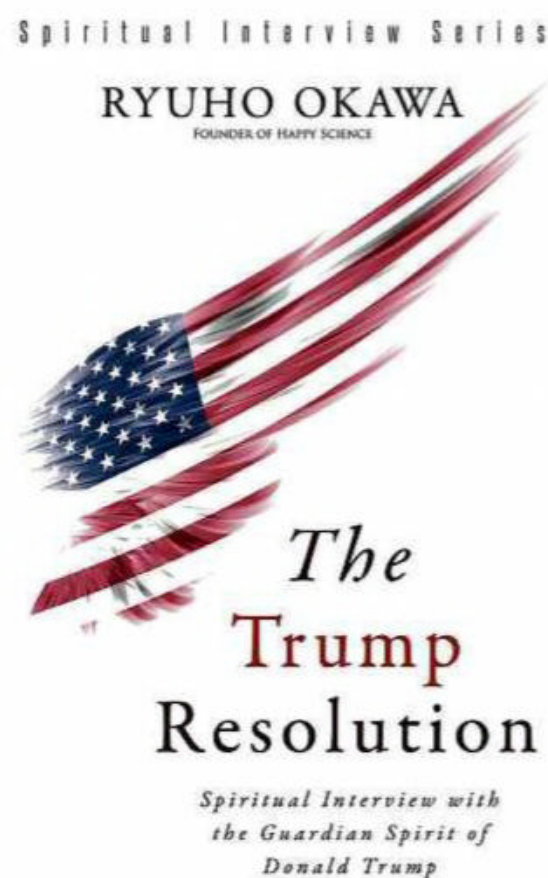
THE IRON LADY-BOY

The site carries a wealth of weirdness I can only hint at here. Particularly impressive was how, in 2013, Margaret Thatcher's ghost granted a world-exclusive first interview only hours after her death – the Lady *was* for returning after all. Although "puzzled by the sudden summoning", it was definitely her, as her spirit said things like "Yes, [I am] the Iron Lady, I'm not very kind, and I have a short temper." On 23 November 1990, the day following Maggie's tearful resignation as PM, Master Okawa had already given a speech declaring the great woman was really an "angel of light" from the seventh dimension, as well as a man who had chosen to be born into a woman's body to advance the feminist cause by swinging her handbag at all and sundry: Mrs T was really Mr T. During a 1986 conversation with the 1,000-year-old female novelist Murasaki Shikibu, Okawa had discovered that, this time around, the gods had given permission for Thatcher to be born with a vagina instead of the penis he/she normally wielded. It transpired Thatcher's previous Earthly incarnation had been as the demonstrably male Otto von Bismarck – Germany's 'Iron Chancellor' transforming with startling logic into Britain's 'Iron Lady'. As Okawa said, this was "a big scoop", and he asked Maggie/Otto what lessons Japan could draw from Britain's conduct during the Falklands War. If Japan and China were currently at loggerheads over the disputed Senkaku Islands, like Britain and Argentina once were over the Falklands, then what should Tokyo do? According to Samurai Thatcher: "You must attack, of course... [As I said to my Cabinet in 1982] If we believe that it's our island, we must keep it, protect it, and attack our enemies, the invaders, and destroy them!" ⁸

When he first attracted public attention, Master Okawa sounded every bit as belligerent as Maggie. Riding the tail-end of Tokyo's 1980s stock-market miracle, Okawa's 1991 top-seller *Nostradamus: Terrifying Prophecies* claimed Japan's destiny was to become 'Leviathan', the last superpower standing in a post-Cold War world. "In the 21st century there will be no enemies for Leviathan," he had Nostradamus predict.



MARGARET THATCHER'S GHOST GRANTED AN INTERVIEW



"It will slash the throats of the old eagle [America] and the exhausted Red bear [Russia], and laugh at the ageing Europe. It will use China as a slave and Korea as a prostitute." ⁹ One appraisal of the early HS creed was of "a constantly changing cosmology based on social Darwinism"

which "matched the ebullient, competitive mood of the [late-1980s] bubble-economy". Times change, though, and any successful right-wing coalition must now tread a fine line between appealing to traditional conservatives and more liberal centre-right figures, so Okawa's toned-down domestic message is now Darwinian more in its habit of adapting to an evolving environment. When in 2016 a misfit stabbed 19 disabled people dead at a Japanese care-home, Okawa saw an opportunity to release yet another book, *Love, the Disabled and the Workings of the Devil*, in which he argued the Hitler-loving killer was possessed by the ghost of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose cruel 'survival of the fittest'-style doctrine had to be resisted. Though an economic burden, the disabled must still be supported; especially as many had selflessly *chosen* to be born like that, to "awaken to love" the souls of compassionate, able-bodied tax-payers. ¹⁰

MERCURY RISING

Another tactic was to exploit Thatcher's inherently cross-over status as a cross-gender ghost to win over both right-wing social liberals and right-wing economic liberals by pursuing the 'pink pound'. "Spiritual research" caused Okawa to realise that if a male soul like Mrs Thatcher is suddenly reborn in a female body, force of habit might see her still attracted to women, meaning she is either born a lesbian or with gender dysphoria – which is fine, says Okawa, as he'd still love their votes. Being born in the wrong body should be viewed as an opportunity "for polishing and training the soul", he argues, citing the case of one voter who had been too aggressively masculine in a previous incarnation as a samurai who was later reborn with breasts "to balance out the radical samurai's karma". Businesses should welcome this phenomenon, as reincarnated LGBT wallets were worth \$4 trillion globally; Okawa suggested supporters establish "bridal businesses that accept gay weddings".

So, that's Matthew Parris's vote won. How to woo Norman Tebbit, too? By warning gays not to go "too far" in their rainbow ways and unleash a wave of queer "extremism"; if Japan bent too far to pink power, then even fewer citizens would get pregnant, national demographics would totally collapse and "the future of humanity could be endangered."

To soothe the Tebbit caucus, therefore, Okawa raised the ghost of Freddie Mercury who, he helpfully explained, was "a gay man who had relationships with many men and women, which caused him to contract AIDS." Freddie's suffering soul said he was doomed to strut our Earth forever like the Wandering Jew; was the flamboyant former Queen frontman being punished by God for leading a life of overly-bohemian rhapsody? Freddie "was religiously Zoroastrian", said Okawa, so he conjured Zoroaster's own ghost

to provide clarification. “Gay is evil,” spat the holy Persian prophet, but as Freddie’s music was so funky, he had grudgingly been shown mercy and allowed to *danse macabre* about the world post-death instead of being cast into the flames of Hell – a wise electoral compromise.¹¹

PUBIC RELATIONS DISASTER

One of HS’s first political PR campaigns came in 1994 when disciples marched through Tokyo waving placards demanding ‘STOP THE HAIR NUDES!’; they objected to modern Japanese porn-mags openly displaying pubic hair instead of obscuring it with a little black rectangle. As *salarymen* often read such publications on trains, the Happies felt kids might sneak a peek, thus warping their minds. By damning these “hair nudes”, Okawa hoped to gain kudos from moral conservatives.¹² But such activities caused more liberal folk alarm, due to the general anti-religious sentiments “which leftist post-war education has fostered”.

There are many *shinshukyo*, or new religious movements, in Japan, the best-known being the now-banned Aum Shinrikyo, whose deadly sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 killed 13 people and injured 5,000. It is well remembered that Aum plotted mass murder only after being rejected by voters at the 1990 General Election – would the Happies one day do the same? Seemingly not. The HRP preaches only peace; except against Pyongyang, obviously. Okawa says he actually tried to warn authorities about Aum’s plans to attack Tokyo with remote-controlled, sarin-loaded mini-helicopters, claiming he was targeted by the cult himself, having VX nerve-agent pumped into his car by assassins. HS and Aum did not get on; as Aum’s perverted, semi-sightless leader Shoko Asahara used to clip and collect his followers’ pubes, whereas the far smoother Master Okawa wished only to banish such hairy horrors from his sight forever, they proved natural enemies. Trading insults, Okawa called Shoko a “frog” due to his habit of underwater yoga, while Shoko mocked Okawa’s lack of asceticism; possibly it was such relentless Master-baiting that made Asahara blind in the first place. Nonetheless, in the wake of Aum’s attacks, restrictive anti-*shinshukyo* laws were passed, so entering politics was a prudent counter-move.

In 1995, HS founded The Association for the Protection of the Nation from Heretical Religions, thereby asserting that, unlike Aum, they were not one, and recruited prominent politicians to their cause, like mainstream LDP Party MP Hiroshi Mitsuzuka. In the book *Hiroshi Mitsuzuka for Prime Minister!* HS offered the LDP support on strict condition their smiling acolyte was made its leader.¹³ But he never was, so HS took matters into their own hands instead.

Oddly enough, many HRP policies are actually not *that* far from the domestic political mainstream these days. In 2015,



APP VIA GETTY IMAGES

FACING PAGE: Master Okawa has talked at length to the ghost of Margaret Thatcher and the Spirit Guardian of President Trump. **ABOVE:** Pube-loving Aum leader Shoko Asahara was no friend of the anti-hair nude Happies.

aspects of Article 9 of the constitution were indeed bypassed by the current LDP PM, Shinzo Abe, just as Okawa wanted, and, given North Korea’s penchant for WMD-based blackmail, the notion of a nuclear-armed Japan is no longer quite as unthinkable as it once was. In response to demographic decline, PM Abe has cautiously begun opening the borders to larger and larger numbers of East Asian migrant-workers too, hoping to turbo-charge the free-market economy. Rather surprisingly, Happy Days might lie ahead for Japan after all...

NOTES

A good general source of information used throughout is Trevor Astley’s 1995 essay ‘The Transformation of a Recent Japanese New Religion: Okawa Ryuho and Kofuku no Kagaku’ in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22/3-4, p.343-380, online at <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2580>.

1 <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2010/06/30/japanese-politics-the-unusual-suspects/>; www.ageekinjapan.com/doctor-nakamatsu/; <http://www.japaninc.com/article.php?articleID=653>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoshiro_Nakamatsu; bizarre footage of Dr N on the campaign-trail can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb5-3205M38>

2 <http://happy-science.org/ryuho-okawa/>; <http://happy-science.org/el-cantare/>

3 <http://happy-science.org/activities/>

4 www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2009/08/04/issues/party-offers-a-third-way-happiness/#.Vs2ME2pFDcs; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happiness_Realization_Party; www.youtube.com/watch?v=k354akEKAzw

5 <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2016/6091/>; To protect the HRP’s US political soul-mate, Dr NakaMats has now developed a ‘self-defence wig’ for use by Trump, filled with hidden iron bars, to enable him to take out any wannabe assassins by flinging it at their heads with a secret spring. Film of NakaMats

promoting this item, together with detailed patent-diagrams, is online at www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-guard-weaponized-wig_us_56d603b4e4b0871f60ed0584

6 www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2009/08/04/issues/party-offers-a-third-way-happiness/#.Vs2ME2pFDcs; for Nelson Mandela’s opinion that, if Japan had won WWII, he would never have ended up in prison, see <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2013/4855/>

7 <http://eng.the-liberty.com/about-us/>

8 <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2013/4397/>; the interview also PROVED that Thatcher would have advised us to vote for Brexit (an event Okawa had successfully predicted as early as 1990), thus solving a recent controversy in the British media. You can read more of Mrs T’s stirring rhetoric in Okawa’s books, *Two Spiritual Secrets of the Iron Lady* and *Margaret Thatcher’s Miraculous Message: An Interview With the Iron Lady 19 Hours After Her Death* or at <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2012/995/>; <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2013/4397/>; <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2013/4400/>; <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2016/6344/>

9 www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-10-19-ca-721-story.html

10 <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2017/6868/>; <http://theconversation.com/gurus-gas-attacks-and-pubic-hair-the-strange-history-of-japans-new-religions-97980>

11 <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2018/7245/>; <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2019/7415/>

12 <http://theconversation.com/gurus-gas-attacks-and-pubic-hair-the-strange-history-of-japans-new-religions-97980>

13 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2009/08/04/issues/party-offers-a-third-way-happiness/#.Vs2ME2pFDcs>; <http://happy-science.org/ryuho-okawa/>; <http://eng.the-liberty.com/2014/5110/>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryuho_Okawa

For more Japanese *shinshukyo*, see **FT99:34-39** (Aum Shinrikyo), **154:34-41** (Mahikari) and **173:36-38** (Pana Wave).

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The Digital Triangle

ULRICH MAGIN trawls the depths of the Internet for ships supposedly lost in the Bermuda Triangle

Recently, I tried my hand at digital detective work, using online resources to tackle several Bermuda Triangle mysteries that remain unsolved. My first foray was an attempt to solve the enigma of whether three ships mentioned in each and every book on the Triangle had actually existed and whether they really vanished without trace. I had the idea while rereading David Kusche's *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery – Solved!*, the first and probably best of the debunking books on the subject.¹ As Kusche could find no original 19th century accounts for these cases, I thought an online search was worthwhile.

From Sanderson and Berlitz onwards, each listing of triangle victims has included the vessels *Lotta* (vanished 1866 near Haiti), *Viego* (1868), and *Miramón* (1884, en route to New Orleans). Kusche drew a blank on all three, and concluded that the incidents were wholly imaginary.² If you search for the names with Google books you get several dozen Triangle and mystery books which namedrop them, but I encountered not a single reference in any contemporary newspaper or in any book that did not deal with the Triangle. Another 19th century case for which Kusche found no solution was the strange incident of the *Ellen Austin* in 1881. According to the traditional story, she encountered an abandoned schooner in the mid-Atlantic and put a salvage crew aboard to investigate; they, too, vanished without trace.

The first source for this tale appears to be our fortean ancestor Rupert T Gould, in his *The Stargazer Talks* of 1944, but he provided no references. Kusche



could not find any contemporary news accounts, although research in the *Nautical Research Journal* of 1956 at least managed to confirm that the ship had existed.³

In this case, I found a real incident, but from 1855 not 1881: “Disasters. [...] *Brig Florence*, at this port from Boston, for Darien, Geo., was fallen in with 2nd April, 10 p.m., having been dismantled and otherwise injured the day previous, in a severe gale from S. S. E. to W. Captain and crew taken off and carried to Savannah, by ship *Ellen Austin*, Tucker.”⁴

However, this real-life event did not seem to be the one on which Gould's report was based, so I searched deeper and found the original – but in a work of fiction.

In his story *Bull's Yarn*, the English novelist and short story writer Morley Roberts (1857-1942) has his heroes discover an old French newspaper clipping on marine mysteries:

“I read in English as much of it as I could make out and what I translated is here to look at [...] This is all that was legible:

“Science seeks ... of these terrifying disappearances ... of the *Marie Celeste* that amongst the fatalistic impressions ... by this vanishings of thirteen people after thirteen days navigation.

“The episode of the *Duke of Portland* is still more striking as one discerns in it something of an obstinate purpose, looking like a slaughter willed by fate. In the winter of 1889 the three masted American barque the *Ellen Austin* met in the Atlantic the big sailing ship the *Duke of Portland* bound from New York for London with

a cargo of furniture. The crew had vanished ... mysterious ... of the *Marie Celeste* ... The boats (on board) and the most ... in all parts of the ship. The vessel was so favourably situated for navigation that the captain of the *Ellen Austin* scrupled to abandon her on the open sea (*au large*) and undertook ... risk of ... sent on board (*fit passer*) the *Duke (of Portland)* men to work her and relieve each other at the wheel.

“In the following night there was ... swell and much fog ... and the captain of (the *Ellen Austin*) waited for sunrise ... search of the sailing ship of which they had lost sight (literally ‘the escaped ship’). He (found) her easily but they never saw again the able seamen sent on board her. They had disappeared inexplicably, just as the crew of the *Duke of Portland* had disappeared. They had not even touched the provisions they took with them ... but she ...”⁵

The lacunæ are in the original and are explained by the poor condition of the newspaper clipping, of which Roberts even reproduced a “facsimile”. Interestingly, one of Roberts's editors adds: “It is worth noting that Roberts's inspiration for this story was a real ship called the *Ellen Austin* and similar events to those described which actually occurred in 1881 rather than 1889.”

This hardly helps, as the oldest variant of the alleged 1881 source is Gould, in 1944. Roberts predates him and may well have been his source. Gould was a careful worker, but in this case he appears to have mistaken a fiction

presented as a genuine account for the real thing.

The Internet can be used to get to the bottom of a fortean story in various ways, and even absence can be evidence. The fact that not a single reference to the *Lotta*, *Viego*, and *Miramón* can be found in Google books nor in any of the English language newspapers online – and that the only references to these vanishing ships are in books on the Bermuda Triangle – does not prove the episodes are invented, but it makes this explanation, first proposed by Kusche, more likely. That several search engine trawls with variants of the names and dates could not detect any contemporary trace of these three incidents in the vast data bank that is the Internet certainly indicates (though does not prove) that none exist. Unless the alleged original French source turns up, we can safely assume that the *Ellen Austin* story, as related by Gould, was a fabrication created for a piece of fiction. Perhaps we can use online search engines that go deep into our printed past as a gauge to the reliability of other stories presented as historical forteana by seeing whether they were actually reported in times past.

NOTES

¹ Lawrence David Kusche, *Die Rätsel des Bermuda-Dreiecks sind gelöst!*, Rowohlt, 1980 (original: *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery – Solved!*, Harper & Row 1975).

² Kusche, p51.

³ *Nautical Research Journal* 1956, p55.

⁴ *The Sailor's Magazine*, American Seamen's Friend Society, June 1855, p312.

⁵ Morley Roberts, *Followers of the Sea: A Set of Sea-Comedies*, E Nash and Grayson Ltd, 1923; reprinted in Markus Neacey (ed.), *Selected Stories of Morley Roberts*, Victorian Secrets Ltd, 2015.

◆ **ULRICH MAGIN** is a longtime contributor to *FT* and the author of *Investigating the Impossible* (2011). He lives in Germany.

Suspicious types

NOEL ROONEY takes issue with the prejudices underlying academic approaches to conspiracy theory and theorists.

I first became interested in conspiracy theory in the early 1980s, and my introduction to the subject was easily weird enough to get me hooked straightaway. I was working as an outdoor messenger for a firm of lawyers, and spent a good deal of my time wandering around the various inns and courts in and around Fleet Street and Chancery Lane. One day, as I walked past the Royal Courts of Justice on the Strand, I saw a set of placards, each as tall as an average outdoor messenger. The placards laid out a comprehensive (and frankly bonkers) theory about the Jesuits having recruited a famous Northern Irish politician of the time, the Reverend Iain Paisley, and sundry members of the British royal family, into a plot to destabilise the kingdom in readiness for a Vatican *coup d'état*.

Two things particularly struck me about this experience: first, the extraordinary level of (albeit mad) detail that the laboriously hand-painted placards contained; and second, that the person standing next to me, reading with equal fascination, was the tallest individual I had ever encountered. When I asked, my Ethiopian companion (for such he was) told me he was 7ft 2in tall. I copied the whole diatribe by hand into my notebook, and thus began an interest that has persisted to this day.

I soon began to look for books and articles on conspiracy theory; at that time, and for some years afterwards, I mostly found myself reading books of conspiracy theory rather than books or articles on the subject. I did find a copy of *Harper's* magazine



ABOVE: The tin foil hat brigade: a threat to Western democracy, or its staunchest defenders?

with the now-famous article by Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*,¹ and eventually found my way to Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies*,² where the phrase 'conspiracy theory' was first used as a handle for the literature I was now avidly reading.

Then came the 1990s, and the explosion of conspiracist material online, and following closely on its heels, the beginning of a burgeoning field of research into conspiracy theory. From the early 2000s, the number of books and articles on the topic grew exponentially, and conspiracy began to be seen as a field of academic, and even scientific, study. Two points of view dominated these books and articles, and they continue to do so today: first, that conspiracy theory represents a threat to democracy; and second, that conspiracy theory appeals to a particular type of person – that the label 'conspiracy theorist' is, in some respects, a diagnosis.

The first point of view (which we might amiably call the conspiracy theory of conspiracy

Hofstadter was borrowing a clinical term for other purposes

theory) is understandable, and largely wrong. It is still trotted out regularly (see *A Lot of People Are Saying*³ for an up-to-date version) by academics and public commentators who seem to view Western democracy as a fragile construct, liable to collapse at the drop of a tin foil hat. However, most of the conspiracy theorists I have read claim (and I see no reason to disbelieve them) that they are defending democracy, not attacking it.

The wrongness of the second viewpoint is of a rather different order. It is perhaps easiest to understand if we consider a couple of questions that appear in a large proportion of the literature on conspiracy theory. With minor variants, these questions are: what kind of person

believes in/constructs conspiracy theories? And: what makes a person believe that (insert conspiracy theory of choice or *du jour*) is true or plausible? On the face of it, these seem reasonable questions to ask, but behind them lurks a set of prejudices that are somewhat questionable.

Let's broaden our perspective briefly. Assuming (as I think most of us do) that conspiracy theory is, or at least incorporates, a belief system, then we might ask whether, in studies of other belief systems (communism, capitalism, Christianity, Islam, environmentalism) these same questions are quite so regularly asked. The answer turns out to be no; while there are, of course, studies of the psychology of religious and political belief, these are not especially prominent in the study of the systems themselves. To put it another way, imagine that every time you read something on Christianity, the author asked: what type of person becomes a Christian? Or, what would make a person believe the Christian story? In fact, when was the last

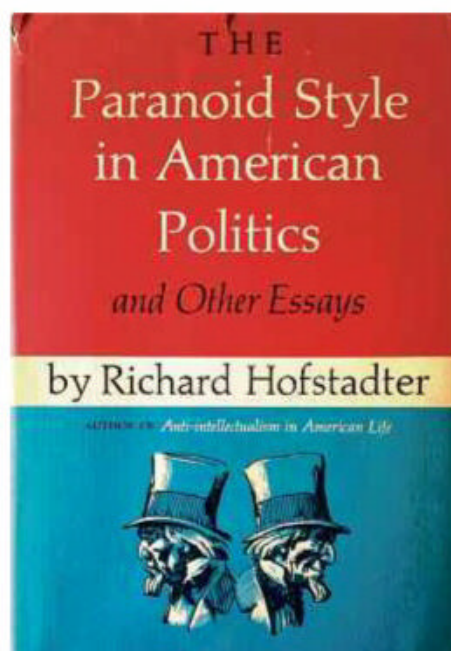


time you read any literature on Christianity where such questions were asked? Probably never.

This type of question is not at the centre of inquiry into any other belief system, and yet it is prevalent to the point of ubiquitous in studies of conspiracy theory. Why? Is conspiracy theory a special case in the field of human belief? And if it is, what is it about conspiracy theory that justifies this status? I suspect there are a number of reasons for this rather odd attitude, some of them connected to those early essays and books on the topic, and some to do with the momentum of certain scientific (and quasi-scientific) ideas. And let's not forget good old-fashioned prejudice; who hasn't entertained the thought of the conspiracy theorist as a nut job, squirrelling around the Internet looking for all the other nut jobs to share crazy ideas with?

In his seminal essay on the subject, Hofstadter was at pains to point out that, although he chose the term 'paranoid' to characterise conspiracism, he was not using it in a clinical sense, but "borrowing a clinical term for other purposes". Nonetheless, the feeling that there was something a little unhealthy about the paranoid style was clearly present in Hofstadter's writing, and in most of the writing and research on conspiracy theory that followed him. If Hofstadter thought conspiracy theory was a special case of belief, however, he meant it only in the sense that he saw it as a quintessentially American school of oddness, a quality stemming from the historical fact that the United States had, itself, been founded on what could reasonably be termed a conspiracy theory.

Subsequent theorising on conspiracy theory has been less forgiving, and has tended to the belief that we are dealing with a kind of pathology, political if not personal. There are dissenting voices, of course; Rob Brotherton's *Suspicious Minds*⁴ is a case in point, as is the writing of Matthew Dentith.⁵ But even in these more even-handed books, there is a sense that belief in

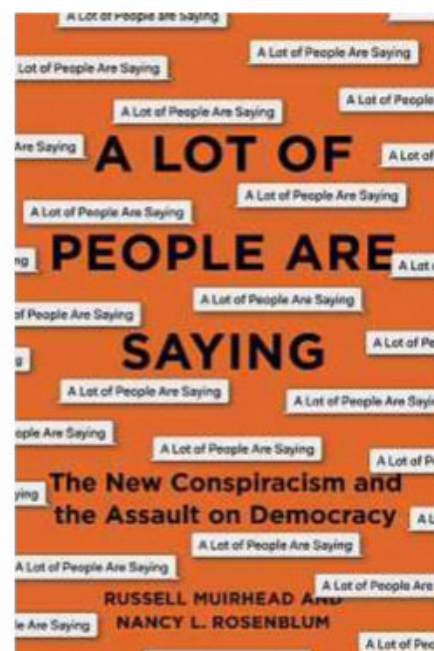


ABOVE: In his seminal book, Richard Hofstadter was not using the word 'paranoid' in its clinical sense, and yet academic approaches to conspiracy theory have tended to assume that some sort of pathology is at work.

conspiracy theory is the result of a disposition, on some or all of our parts, to believe unlikely things.

In the current century, this vague feeling about human disposition has burgeoned into an academic industry.⁶ The psychology of conspiracy theory sees large numbers of books and papers published every year, and pretty much every one of those papers focuses on the innate disposition, or the personality type, involved. This leads us in some curious directions; let's consider a school of thought that I will term the 'gateway drug' approach to conspiracy theory.⁷ In this view, a person who believes one conspiracy is more likely to believe others, and perhaps eventually all of them. Again, on the face of it, this seems reasonable, but let's think about it slightly differently.

You are a rational, curious person, and someone introduces you to the idea that the assassination of JFK was not the work of a lone, nutty super-marksman, but actually a conspiracy involving a number of interested parties. You browse the topic online, and then read a couple of books, and you find the idea plausible, even convincing. That same someone suggests you might look at the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and the Reverend Martin Luther King (and they don't ask for your soul



by return of post so you assume they are trustworthy). Are you more likely to: think "OK, I'll look into it", or throw your hands up and say, "That's preposterous! I'm not going to even think about it"?

I'd suggest that the second response is rather less rational than the first. If a plausible case is presented to you, why would you not look into similar mysteries presented in a similar way? That is to say, if conspiracy seems a reasonable mode of thought, or a reasonable worldview to hold, then it does so by its own merits, and not because of some innate disposition on your part. And here is the nub of the problem in the psychologised approach: by concentrating on the personality of the adherent, it removes agency from conspiracy theory as a mode of thought and shifts it onto the recipient of that mode of thought. In respect of conspiracy theory as a system, it puts the cart firmly before the horse, in fact. Conspiracy theories appeal to a lot of people precisely because they are well-researched, well-argued and offer a plausible case; also because they are amusing or kooky, but that doesn't undermine the point. They don't appeal to us merely because we're a particular type of person, or because we suffer from a specific pathology of personality or belief. Consider what I said earlier about studies of other beliefs and belief

systems; if agency was removed from the object of belief in those other cases, what would happen to them as objects of study? If we shifted focus from Christianity to Christians, and suggested Christian belief was a form of psychological diagnosis, we would radically alter the field of religious studies, and not for the better.

There are plenty of other arguments against the diagnostic approach to conspiracy theory, not least the sheer number of people who believe in at least one conspiracy theory: after all, if everyone is a conspiracy theorist, then effectively no one is; or, to put it another way, a diagnosis that captures a majority of the population may not be telling us very much. I think it's time we began to study the epistemology and structure of conspiracy theory properly, as a *bona fide* system of thought and belief, rather than trawling the stats for the elusive glint of tin foil.

NOTES

1 *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, by Richard Hofstadter, *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964.

2 *The Open Society and its Enemies*, by Karl Popper, Routledge, London 1945.

3 *A Lot of People are Saying: the New conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*, Nancy L Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead, Princeton University Press, 2019.

4 *Suspicious Minds: Why we Believe Conspiracy Theories*, by Rob Brotherton, Bloomsbury Press, November 2015.

5 *The Philosophy of Conspiracy theories*, by Matthew R X Dentith, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014. See also his article "I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but...", **FT324:36-39**.

6 For a comprehensive review of current research on conspiracy theory, see: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Psychological Research on Conspiracy Beliefs: Field Characteristics, Measurement Instruments, and Associations with Personality Traits, in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 February 2019.

7 See, for instance, *Belief in Conspiracy Theories*, by Ted Goertzel, in *Political Psychology*, Vol 15 No 4, December 1994, pp 731-742.

◆ **NOEL ROONEY** is a poet and longstanding *fortean*. He writes *FT's* regular 'Conspirasphere' column.

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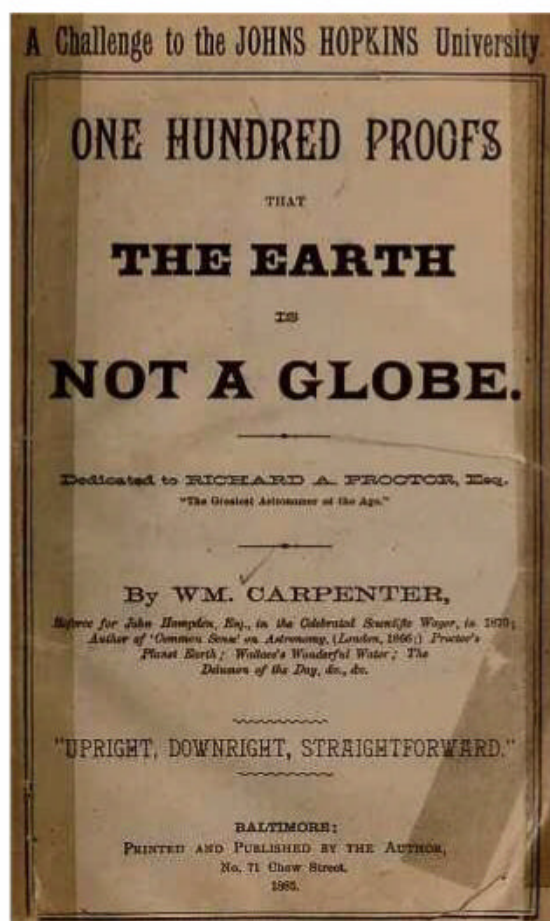
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

NO 52. 100 WAYS TO FALL FLAT ON YOUR FACE

Just as it is the lot of executioners and evangelists to walk among sinners, so it is the fate of forteans to mingle (if only on the page) with the slightly mad and, on occasion, with the wholly deluded. It is our settled opinion, whatever Charles Fort may have said on the subject – and we can't recall if he said anything – that the Earth is an oblate spheroid, trundling around the Sun in an elliptical orbit. This was first shown by an ancient Greek or two, the 16th-century circumnavigator Magellan, and rather conclusively by some wonderful photographs taken more recently from space by sundry astronauts. Yet from about the mid-19th century on there has been a fluctuating band of mild obsessives who insist the Earth is flat, and produce their own idea of proofs that this is so. Back in late 2017, one Mike Hughes from California (where else) attempted to fire a steam-powered [sic] rocket high enough above the Mojave Desert to demonstrate the point [see FT368:10]. The rocket failed. Like other flat-Earthers, Hughes seems convinced a conspiracy of Freemasons and the Illuminati, aided and abetted by NASA (and presumably by Chinese, European, Indian, Israeli and other space agencies) is keeping the truth from the world, although exactly why is never quite clear. One can go down a large and labyrinthine rabbit hole in pursuing this stuff, so we thought we'd bring you the concise version of flat-Eartherism, first published by its author William Carpenter in 1885, and updated in 2017 to include various web links to keep you abreast of current thinking. This is contrarian thinking at its finest. [See also FT328:20-21.]

We're not about to embark on a comprehensive debunk of *One Hundred Proofs that the Earth is not a Globe*, partly because that would be tedious (and overlong), and partly because a fair few of the 100 'proofs' amount to repetitions of others. But we can address those that have struck us most from among the throng of egregious eccentricities...

Carpenter starts with an introduction mostly concerned, or consumed, with exercising great sarcasms against the globalist arguments of astronomer Richard A Proctor (1837–88), who is clearly his *bête noire*. This ultimately causes Carpenter to fall on his face even before he's launched into his 100 'proofs'. "Why," he exclaims, "if it were possible to show the two ends of a four-mile stretch of water to be on a level, with the center portion of that water bulged up, the surface of the Earth would be a series of four-mile curves!" This is partly, um, circular reasoning, seeming to take the flat Earth as a given, but nutty nonetheless. Proctor was using the familiar demonstration of the ship 'sinking' below the horizon as a proof of Earth's globularity. The horizon, on a plain like the mighty Serengeti or in the open sea, is about three miles distant to a 6ft- [1.8m] tall human; add a bit of



range if the observer's on a deck of a boat or top of a bus – 12ft (3.7m) up and the horizon is 4.7 miles (7.6km) distant. Now float on angel's wings above the observer and draw a circle of three miles radius around him: it will have an area of about

28 square miles (73km²). Now think of that circle as the area lit by a spotlight of great power, held aloft by more angels, or aliens, or fairies, if you'd prefer. As the observer moves, so does that pool of light, and the visible horizon retreats accordingly. The distant ship doesn't go up a hill of water and down the other side, it continues on *one* curve, that of the globe. And if you do the arithmetic, you'll discover that that 28 square miles is about seven millionths of the area of the Earth, with a curvature so gentle that for the purposes of map- and chart-making it can be represented as flat, down to quite small scales before becoming practically misleading.

The point about the curve of the globe being gentle enough to be treated for all practical purposes as flat at large scales and, indeed, on the ground, deals in short order with Carpenter's third 'proof': "Surveyors' operations in the construction of railroads, tunnels, or canals are conducted without the slightest 'allowances' being made for 'curvature', although it is taught that this so-called allowance is absolutely necessary! This is a cutting proof that the Earth is not a globe." Was the pun intended, we wonder. That allowance is made automatically through the employment of the humble spirit level and more exalted theodolite and, we have noticed, lengths of string. If it were possible (or even useful) to build a wall or dig a trench of precisely the same height or depth throughout, all along a single line of Earth's latitude, the spirit level at any point would show a 'flat' surface. Actually it's better described as *level*. A railroad built with a flat or straight bed would soon find itself going off at a tangent into space instead of to Chattanooga, Charing Cross, or wherever.

A nice illustration of the difference came from Dr Stirling Colgate (1925–2013), who in 1954 was put in charge of the "fast" diagnostics (neutrons and gamma rays) for the Bravo H-bomb test, on Bikini Atoll. In a memoir (www.nmt.edu/news/all-news/516-2013/4971-meet-dr-stirling-colgate-iconic-tech-president), it's recalled that "There was one particularly amusing part of this bomb test experiment involving a dozen two-mile-long vacuum pipe lines necessary to accurately view the device from far enough away to save the recording equipment from

the expected blast. ‘When six of us young physicists arrived in Bikini several months before the test, but after an immense effort by thousands working for the contractor... we found that the gamma rays from a radioactive test source wouldn’t pass through the vacuum pipelines for a distance of two miles.’”

Oh dear. And why not? Because the contractors had built the pipes level with the ground. At the end furthest from the test site, following the curve of the Earth, they were 32in (81cm) lower than they should have been. Once the scientists had had them straightened out, all went well. But as Colgate said at the time: “Oh my God, they forgot that the Earth is round!”

There are many places in this book (well, about 100) where Carpenter and reality are strangely detached from each other. Other ‘proofs’ are either so convoluted or so aggressively stated as to amount to no proof of anything except militant assertion; these we pass over in silence. Here comes a selection of the most outstanding that lay claim to reasoning.

You could choose any line of latitude to argue about, but Carpenter selects 45° as suitable – that is, halfway between the poles and the equator. He maintains (see Proofs 63, 78) that ships circumnavigating the globe along the southern latitude take vastly longer than travellers along the same northern latitude. As indeed they would, were the Earth to be flat. This is difficult to digest, as a glance at a world map will show that only an amphibious vessel could manage the northern journey. Carpenter cites the southern circumnavigation of HMS *Challenger*, which covered “indirectly, to be sure” nearly 69,000 nautical miles in her three-year voyage (1872–76). *Challenger* didn’t follow the 45th parallel, and if she had she would still have added a bit to the calculated (global) distance in order to dodge South America and the Antipodes; and the length of the overall journey would include sailing south to the 45th, and back north to England. But “indirectly, to be sure” indeed describes her voyage, as that actually involved sailing south down the Atlantic, heading east to circumnavigate Australia, then north into the Pacific, then south and around Cape Horn before cruising north past West Africa and crossing the Atlantic to have a snoop around Newfoundland and then south again to nose around the West Indies before heading back to England. Not bad for a paddle-assisted sailing ship, and not exactly your direct trip along a southern parallel, either. (A similar fast one is pulled by other Flat Earthers, who cite the circumnavigations of Capt. James Cook,



ABOVE: William Carpenter pictured in the *Buffalo Evening News* in 1885.

line from pole to pole. It’s only ‘semi-circular’ when viewed from an angle. So Mr Carpenter’s proof is not so incontrovertible after all.

Then we have his various objections to globularity, which, in so many words, suggest that people in the southern hemisphere would fall into space. He never mentions the word ‘gravity’, but it’s clear he rejects the very idea of it (Proofs 21, 86, 87). That people, cats, chess tables or trains don’t drop away into infinitudes is a proof that the Earth is flat, and furthermore is motionless in space. Why people don’t just get *blown* off into space in mighty storms, he doesn’t explain. On a related point (Proof 85), he assures us that rivers don’t flow uphill (true, indeed), so rivers flowing south-to-north are possible only on a flat Earth, since on a globe they would have to be flowing upward. But on a

globe – or anywhere – rivers flow downhill just the same, from high points to low, in any direction. Gravity, that Newtonian unmentionable, has somewhat to do with this, as well as the strange truth that in space there isn’t really an ‘up’, ‘down’ or even a sideways: if the south magnetic pole were stronger than the north, cartographers might well have drawn their maps the other way up.

Some of Carpenter’s proofs are flat-out lies: see No 71, in which he claims that the North Star has been seen 20° south of the equator. No it hasn’t. It isn’t visible below the equator at all, to which we can attest from personal experience. And some are just plain weird, as in No 93: “We have seen that astronomers – to give us a level surface on which to live – have cut off one half of the ‘globe’ in a certain picture in their books. Now... one half of the substance of their ‘spherical theory’ is given up!... Nothing remains, then, but a plane Earth, which is, of course, a proof that the Earth is not a globe.” By the same logic, an anatomical drawing of a human leg – just the one – would imply that humans hop about, and do not actually walk on two feet.

From various comments (see Proof 17, and the introduction, and other Proofs *passim*) it becomes clear that Carpenter’s real gripe is with ‘science’, which he sees as defying the Word of God. To that extent flat-Eartherism is of a piece with the great 19th-century protest against Darwin, which created a false dichotomy and factitious hostilities between science and religion. Carpenter’s book is a monument to being on the wrong side of both.

William Carpenter, *One Hundred Proofs that the Earth is not a Globe*, Nouveau Classics (1885) 2017.

“IF A BOOK
ABOUT FAIL-
URES DOESN’T
SELL, IS IT A
SUCCESS?”

Jerry Seinfeld

whose voyages – especially his second – were equally, if not more, tortuous.)

One of Carpenter’s other curious claims is that the world is cooler south of the equator. Tell that to the Australians, or whoever, if anyone, lives in the Atacama Desert.

We have a fine example of Carpenter making the wrong assumptions in his treatment of the compass needle, which, we all know, points north. Carpenter, taking the flat Earth for granted, insists (Proof 11) that t’other end of the needle therefore points in all directions south, and this a proof that the Earth is not a globe. Sure, if your reasoning is circular. But on a globular Earth, the other end of the needle *must* point (roughly) to the South Pole. Carpenter’s wonky logic excels itself in Proof 13: “As the mariner’s compass points north and south at the same time, and a meridian is a north and south line, it follows that meridians can be no other than straight lines. But since all meridians on a globe are semicircles, it is an incontrovertible proof that the Earth is not a globe.” Well, not quite. A meridian – a line of latitude – is straight as a die, viewed from directly above as a

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What did India ever do for us?

Bob Rickard finds that our civilisation goes back to the Ancient Greeks, yes – but that Greece in its turn was strongly influenced by India

The Greek Experience of India

From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks

Richard Stoneman

Princeton University Press 2019

Hb, 525pp, £30, illus, bib, index.

ISBN: 780691154039

It's received wisdom that the Ancient Greeks started Western civilisation with a big bang, the echoes of which can be found almost everywhere to this day. Maths and geometry, philosophy, democratic government, the eponymous Games, distinctive architecture, sculpture and pottery, great literature, archetypal myths... and, apparently, taking showers.

It turns out that although Western civilisation legitimately claims the Greeks as its forefathers, it owes a considerable debt to India too. Prof Richard Stoneman is not the first to examine this debt, but in *The Greek Experience of India* he analyses it in satisfying detail.

Stoneman paints a broad portrait of the world known to the Greeks. From the Black Sea to the Atlantic coast of France, coastlines were dotted with Greek colonies, each spreading their language, philosophies, learning and technology with the benefit of their trades and trading routes. Even the armies and battles spread ideas of organisation, discipline and tactics, many of which still have martial influence today.

This Hellenistic idyll lasted from the eighth century BC until the Romans began their dominance in the second century BC.

Before he died in 323 BC at the age of 32, Alexander established, in Alexandria, Egypt, the capital of an empire that stretched from the Mediterranean to the city of Taxila in what is now northern Pakistan.

After Alexander, the Greeks' idea of India referred to most of the northern half of the subcontinent. To the Greeks its inhabitants were called Indoi (people of the Indus River); to the Indians, the Greeks were Yavanas (derived from "Ionians").

Even before Alexander's death there had been a continual flow of cultural influences – particularly of philosophy – along the trade routes to India.

The cultural historian Max Dashu notes that what the Christians later called "pagan" was otherwise represented by the word "Hellene" which "for many meant something closer to Indian Vedanta than classical belief in an Olympic pantheon".

This two-way exchange is brought out well in Stoneman's book: you can find columns in the Greek styles far away in north-eastern India, and there is some evidence that

Greek mythology absorbed elements from contemporary Vedic sources: there are similar events in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*, and the Greek Zeus (Dios) resembles the Vedic Dyaus.

While Stoneman presents much tangible evidence for these mutual influences (mainly artefacts and art works), it seems almost ironic that those that had a greater and longer lasting effect were the more intangible evidences: such subjects as math-

ematics (including an accurate value of pi), natural history, early sciences and particularly philosophy.

Just as, in those days, "Egypt" became the byword for "esoteric magic", so "India" came to represent, for the Greeks, a very different world that was both exotic and utopian.

As Stoneman notes: "The Greeks were entranced by Indian philosophy from early times. Pythagoras, who has the credit for

"There had been a continual flow of cultural influences along the trade routes to India"

inventing the word [philosophy], was said to have longed to go to India but never made it."

India inspired that pure "love of wisdom", and also the virtues of *ataraxia* (a state of inner tranquillity as expounded by Epicurus), and *eudaimonia* (the "natural goodness" extolled by Aristotle). It is not surprising that inspirational figures such as Jesus and Apollonius (among others) acquired legends that they too went to India early in their careers.

One of the most significant events occurred when Alexander arrived in Taxila and observed a company of "naked philosophers" – undoubtedly yogis – practising their austerities. When Alexander's officers, through interpreters, inquired about their beliefs and lifestyle, they were surprised by the answers. Here were intelligent men, who extolled the virtue of owning nothing and who were content with whatever was given to them,

telling the most powerful warrior-king of the known world that his wanderings and splendour were ultimately useless. We all die and can take nothing with us, they said. This was not pessimism but a demonstration of *ataraxia* and detachment.

It is an indication that Alexander was moved by this encounter with the naked *gymnosophoi* that he welcomed one of them into his company. The sadhu Kalanos travelled with Alexander on his return to the West.

After seven months, the aged Kalanos fell ill in Persepolis. As this illness was incurable and "having received the utmost limit of happiness from nature and Fortune", he asked Alexander to build him a pyre. Before the assembled army, Kalanos "cheerfully mounted the pyre and perished. Some thought him mad, some vainglorious about his ability to bear pain, while others marvelled at his fortitude and contempt for death" (Diodorus). Stoneman's chapter on Kalanos and the history of suttee (after the goddess Sati) is absolutely fascinating.

Above all, it was the doctrines of the transmigration of souls and vegetarianism that impressed the Greek world most; both had preceded Alexander among the pre-Socratic philosophers, especially the Pythagoreans.

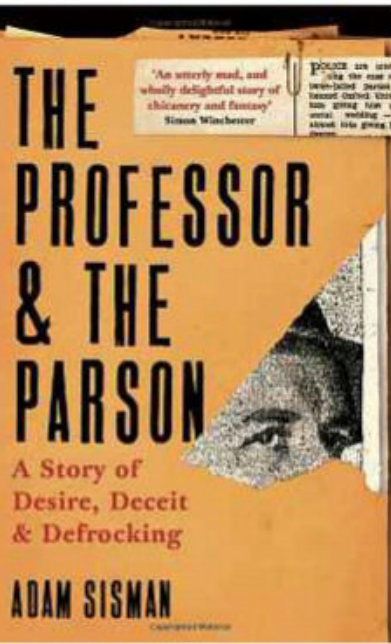
Stoneman depicts this world brilliantly, drawing on the primary classical sources from Strabo to Megasthenes (who actually travelled to India c. 300 BC) with such a direct narrative skill that the casual reader will hardly realise this is a solid scholarly thesis. This is an excellent introduction to the relevant source materials and their authors, and destined to be a valued reference.

★★★★★



Master of deception

Was he a priest or an academic – or just a very clever and manipulative liar?



The Professor and the Parson

A Story of Desire, Deceit and Defrocking

Adam Sisman

Profile Books 2019

Hb, 240pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781788162111

This is the story of a notorious charlatan – and the famed historian who kept watch.

Our parson is Robert Parkin Peters: academic imposter, defrocked Anglican priest, irrepressible fraud. Our professor is the eminent Hugh Trevor-Roper, who crossed paths with the bogus Peters at Oxford in 1958. Though their meeting was brief, and Peters lied directly to Trevor-Roper’s face, the former’s outrageous claims fascinated the latter for decades. The file he kept on Peters’s misdeeds forms the basis of Adam Sisman’s crisp biography of a sullied subject.

Sisman discovered Peters when writing a biography of Trevor-Roper, and became so intrigued he chose to chronicle Peters’ disgraceful life himself. Trevor-Roper had also considered writing an account of Peters, but was dissuaded by the potential for lawsuit. (Peters got combative when his fake credentials met legitimate challenge, growing outraged and volcanic when

pressed.) But Peters died in 2005, aged 87, leaving Sisman to take up Trevor-Roper’s long-observed subject.

We can perhaps grant Peters sympathy, considering he was born disabled and spent his first nine years in a steel frame. But is this true? It’s doubtful, as it was a hard-luck tale spun by Peters himself in a 1959 *Sunday Pictorial* tell-all. Baring his stained soul, Peters admitted to fabricating his past, to being married four times, and to being defrocked, but vowed those days were over. Over 40 years of deception would follow this public repentance: a cascade of marriages (probably eight in all), deportations and shortly-held academic and church positions. An audacious pretender, he even appeared as “Dr Robert Peters, Minister of Religion” on Mastermind in 1983.

The boldness of it all was what grabbed Trevor-Roper. Peters used fake credentials and pious posturing to gain positions of authority, in the Church and in academia. At times he comes over as an underdog eccentric who scammed pompous academics and exposed the vulnerabilities of rarefied institutions.

This might be partly true, but it wasn’t harmless fun. Peters was certainly a predator who deceived many, first and foremost the countless women he manipulated. Sisman chalks it up to narcissistic personality disorder, summarising his subject as a man for whom “the act of worship was also one of self-worship”.

Peters presented himself as a man of letters, as a man of the cloth, but the letters were forged and the cloth was wool pulled over unsuspecting eyes. It’s certainly worth taking a cue from Trevor-Roper and keeping tabs on frauds like Peters that come into our own lives.

Mike Pursley

★★★★

The Enfield Poltergeist Tapes

One of the most disturbing cases in history. What really happened?

Melvyn Willin

White Crow Books 2019

Pb, 206pp, £11.99, ISBN 9781786770738

In the 43 years since its occurrence, the Enfield poltergeist of 1977-79 has remained an impressive but controversial case. Investigators Maurice Grosse and Guy Playfair undertook 180 periods of observation at the home of the Hodgson family in Enfield, north London, obtaining over 200 audio cassettes of events and phenomena recorded on a daily and nightly basis. In the course of digitising these tapes for the Society for Psychical Research, Melvyn Willin has listened to all of them, as well as accessing the voluminous documentation. The results are distilled into this book, an impartial re-telling of the case.

The most controversial aspect of the Enfield case was the emergence of a gruff, masculine voice from 11-year-old Janet Hodgson and occasionally from her sister and brother. Willin summarises the contents of recordings, presenting the edited and often expurgated highlights of this voice, its outpourings and the reactions of the family and observers.

The Voice (as it became known) variously identified itself as different deceased people, whistled, barked, shrieked and imitated a dog. Such mediumistic communications from apparent discarnate beings are present in many poltergeist cases, but the Enfield Voice only rarely said anything meaningful or intelligent. This curious aspect alone proved enough to put many academics off the case, especially when in December 1977 the voice made comments about menstruation.

Seeking further perspectives on the recordings, Willin reviews the long-neglected report produced in 1982 by the Enfield Poltergeist Investigation Committee, a group of SPR members who examined the original evidence and re-interviewed witnesses and a hitherto unpublished private report written by Maurice Grosse. Given

that the ancient designation of “unclean spirit” provides an apt description of the frequently obscene utterances of the Voice, Willin includes a short chapter comparing and contrasting elements from Enfield with the Mount Rainier poltergeist of 1949 which served as an inspiration for *The Exorcist*.

Additional insights and reflections from interviews with surviving witnesses of the events of 1977-79 prove most interesting. Three useful appendices cover people, key dates and phenomena. Avoiding giving any personal verdict, Willin acknowledges that much more remains to be said, including on compelling evidence in the form of photographs and other documentary sources.

The evidential problem with Enfield is not a lack of data but a surfeit. If Grosse and Playfair made one mistake it was assuming this would attract scientists and scholars. Both at

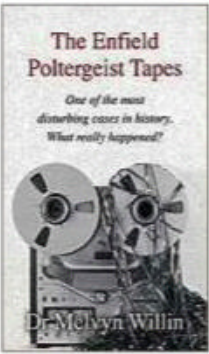
the time and subsequently it was suggested that the original investigators were out of their depth. But as this book indicates, all too often it was remote academics who proved ill-equipped in responding effectively, either to the evidence arising in an

on-going case or in properly comprehending the impact of these events on the lives of a troubled and impoverished single-parent family. This failure to engage and empathise is recognised by Dr Hugh Pincott, interviewed by Willin. It echoes the succinct comment by Grosse and Playfair in the *SPR Journal* in 1988 concerning the reception their investigation received in academic circles: “There are those, we have found, who are prepared to believe in psi phenomena provided they happened a long time ago and preferably in another country. The suggestion that they happened yesterday evening right here is less welcome.”

In providing a detailed and condensed summary of this complex material, this book will act as a confidence-boosting handbook for open-minded scholars willing to probe this impressive and enigmatic case further.

Alan Murdie

★★★★★





The Texas Chain Saw Massacre

The Film that Terrified a Rattled Nation

Joseph Lanza

Skyhorse Publishing 2019

Hb, 296pp, illus, notes, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9781510737907

The making of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* has already been detailed in a definitive book by Stefan Jaworzyn and a handful of documentaries. Does Joseph Lanza's book add anything new?

Clearly, director Tobe Hooper was interested in fortean subjects; the movie begins with ominous sunspots and vague astrological warnings. I've no doubt Hooper would have enjoyed the couple of pages on Charles Fort and the fact that this book leads off with a quote from *The Book of the Damned*: "All things merge into everything else".

After that, much of the book is debatable. The author frequently quotes from a memoir by chainsaw-wielding actor-poet Gunnar Hansen, but I notice he doesn't quote the interview in which Hansen dismissed all theories about deep subtext in the movie as "bunk".

The author considers *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* a rebuke to Charles A Reich's *The Greening of America*; certainly the film has gruesome fun at the expense of hippies. He also believes Fort predicted the Nixon cabinet, an intriguing suggestion. I was a little taken aback by his claim that the relatively benign armadillo, a humble armour-plated symbol of the southwest, is a repulsive and "alien" creature "even when dead".

Those are just a few of the tangents in Joseph Lanza's book, which is only half about the movie. The rest of the book is a study of the events of the late Sixties and early Seventies. It's always fascinating to be reminded that Nixon henchman E Howard Hunt wrote a book on witchcraft conspiracy. But there are already plenty of in-depth histories about this turbulent era, and you may wish you were reading one of them instead.

Learning about the various

serial killers that were running around at the time gives you the idea that maybe Leatherface and his family weren't all that out of the ordinary. We hear about the Zodiac Killer and the Manson Family for the umpteenth time, we get the gay side of serial killing with the Candy Man Killer and the Doodler, and we have radicals like the SLA and the Black Liberation Army, plus the racially charged Zebra killings.

We turn to cult groups like the Mel Lyman Family for a reminder that the Mansons were hardly the only communal group that had the authorities worried. For a further slice of religious controversy we get a look at Madalyn Murray O'Hair, a famously outspoken atheist who came to a gruesome end. Which

is all very interesting and depressing, but what does it have to do with the movie?

I'm not sure this is the best way to appreciate a work of art, be it a piece of music or a scabrous horror film. It's a bit like trying to look at *Guernica*

while a yappy tour guide is yelling facts about the Spanish Civil War in your ear. The book almost comes across as a novel, as Lanza ruminates on the many disturbing threads running through the 1970s. The approach would seem almost too cute and clever if the author's sincerity didn't shine through.

The idea that the cannibalistic cook was intended as a caricature of Nixon seems pretty ludicrous to me, but at least it is an amusing notion. I was less patient with the chapter on *No Country for Old Men*; the theme of growing old in a strange land is a lot like the theme of hippies being carved up with chainsaws, it seems. Really?

A diverting book, but it often left me thinking, "Oh, brother!"

Brett Taylor

★★★

Of Mud & Flame

The Penda's Fen Sourcebook

Eds Matthew Harle & James Machin

Strange Attractor Press 2019

Pb, 367pp, £16.99, illus, notes, ind, ISBN 9781907222689

In March 1974 the BBC screened a very strange play in their Play For Today slot. *Pendas's Fen* almost defies précis; when I reviewed

the newly-released BFI DVD of it here in 2016 I wrote: "*Penda's Fen* is undefinable and almost indescribable. It's a 90-minute mood piece; there's little or no storyline." There is, but its progression is fragmentary.

Stephen, a very conservative, somewhat priggish A-level student, is tormented by fellow pupils who realise he is gay long before he does; he has conversations with his adoptive father on Manichaeism; he encounters Penda, the last Pagan Saxon king, in the Worcestershire hills; he ultimately rejects insularity and Mary Whitehouse-type constricted morality; and all to the powerful chords of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*.

It's more than a coming-of-age tale; it's a story of awakening, of rebirth and reimagining, not just transformation but transfiguration, and of the acceptance that Englishness is something very broad, essentially mongrel, not narrow and insular: "My race is mixed, my sex is mixed, I am woman and man, and light with darkness, mixed, mixed! I am nothing special, nothing pure. I am mud and flame!" Stephen cries in the final scene.

In 2017 two Birkbeck College alumni assembled speakers for a one-day symposium on *Penda's Fen*; this book is the outcome of that conference. It contains some 20 essays, mainly by academics, as well as a couple of short pieces by Rudkin, interviews with Spencer Banks, who played Stephen, and Christopher Douglas, who played another schoolboy, Honeybone, and the complete script of *Penda's Fen*.

Many of the essays are illuminating; several rightly draw comparisons between Rudkin's play and Alan Garner's work: the untamable power of myth and landscape unleashed on present-day people. Others mention links often drawn between *Penda's Fen* and "the recently canonised 1970s Folk Horror triumvirate of *Witchfinder General*, *Blood on Satan's Claw* and *The Wicker Man*" – while pointing out that Rudkin himself distanced the play from Folk Horror, saying: "It's a bloody political piece."

Several of the essays would have benefited from an editor's red pen, for their length or their opacity. Some writers seem more interested in their own specialisms than in the play itself. One picks up on the briefest reference to a film director in Rudkin's script – "Now the scene is like a portrait, or a still from a Carl Dreyer film" – to write a 10-page essay

far more about Dreyer's work than about *Penda's Fen*. Another starts his essay by saying that a one-time TV critic of *The Listener*, Raymond Williams, had left the post by the time *Penda's Fen* screened, and may not even have watched it. He then launches into 17 pages all about Williams

(on whom, the Notes tell us, he wrote his MA dissertation), only occasionally referring to *Penda's Fen*.

But despite these caveats this is a worthwhile project; reading so many different perspectives on the play gives a host of new insights into what is still, nearly 50 years later, a remarkable piece of television history.

David V Barrett

★★★

Strange but True

10 of the World's Greatest Mysteries Explained

Kathryn Hulick, illustrated by Gordy Wright

Francis Lincoln 2019

Hb, 128pp, £14.99, illus, notes, ISBN 9781786037855

Every one of us would have loved to have had this book at the age of 12-14. It's big, it's

colourful, it's exciting.

It covers UFO encounters, haunted houses, lost worlds, the mystery of ancient civilisations, "zombi slaves", psychic phenomena, the mummy's curse, the Bermuda Triangle, the Dyatlov Pass deaths and Nessie, amongst much else.

But most importantly it cautions young readers to "practise the art of doubt". "Check the sources. Interrogate the evidence. Watch out for coincidences." It even explains sleep paralysis and false memories.

An absolutely excellent introduction for young forteans.

Chris Hayhurst

★★★★★



Protect and Survive

Fall-out shelters made from soft furnishings and terrifyingly bland graphics: a wonderful visual history of the attack that never came

Nuclear War in the UK

Taras Young

Four Corners Irregulars 2019

Hb, 128 pp, £10, illus, ISBN 9781909829169



Many years ago, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a tour of RAF Scampton, then partially mothballed, an historic site that was once home to 617 Squadron (the famous ‘Dambusters’) and later to Britain’s V bombers, armed with Blue Steel missiles. As we faced the runway, my guide, the late Mervyn Hallam, a lifelong RAF man, mentioned that this was where the Vulcans had been on 15 minutes’ readiness “during World War III”; he quickly corrected this to “the Cold War”, but he’d already plunged us into a weird hauntological space where rural Lincolnshire had been at the centre of a devastating thermonuclear global

conflict. For the then-busy station and the Vulcan crews, the war had evidently been very real, even if hostilities were never announced.

Taras Young’s excellent little book takes us to a similar space, providing a rich visual history of preparedness for an attack that never came. While outlining the Government’s policies for dealing with a nuclear onslaught, the book is primarily concerned with the ways these were imagined in a series of printed materials issuing from the Central Office of Information and other official bodies. The notorious ‘Protect and Survive’ campaign of the 1980s is the best-remembered. Planned from the mid-1970s as part of a co-ordinated campaign using film and radio materials produced by the COI, the infamous booklet was published after public pressure in 1980. Released outside of its intended context, as Young remarks, the booklet seemed at once “sinister and quite pathetic”, and it met with a withering reception from everyone from Raymond Briggs to *The Young Ones* and was parodied in *Ben’s Bunker Book* and EP

Thompson’s *Protest and Survive*.

The terrifyingly bland graphics are reproduced here alongside a wealth of less familiar material from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s. There are survival guides produced by District and Parish Councils, promotional literature from bodies such as the Royal Observer Corps, and some truly bizarre commercial efforts such as *Protect and Survive Monthly* (“Will Your Pet Survive a Nuclear War?”) and various ads for private nuclear bunkers.

It’s hard to look at this stuff without thinking of Richard Littler’s *Scarfolk*. It embodies precisely the same mixture of supposedly reassuring, but deeply sinister, official blandness and unthinkable terror: just look at the Ladybird Book-like mushroom cloud engulfing Hull shown below. Four Corners Irregulars have produced a handsome book with excellent reproductions of rarely seen material, while Young’s succinct account provides the necessary context. At £10, it’s a bargain.

David Sutton

★★★★★

Britain’s Forgotten Serial Killer

The Terror of the Axeman

John Lucas

Pen & Sword 2019

Pb, 213pp, £14.99, illus, bib, ind, ISBN 9781526748843

Britain’s Forgotten Serial Killer tells the story of Patrick Mackay, who went on a rampage in the mid-1970s, murdering at least three people.

As a young man, Patrick Mackay made a career of mugging wealthy old London ladies. Since at the time, such a cowardly crime was quite uncommon, the trusting old women allowed Mackay to carry their shopping home for them, and invited him into their flats. The psychopath repaid them by knocking them down and stealing their



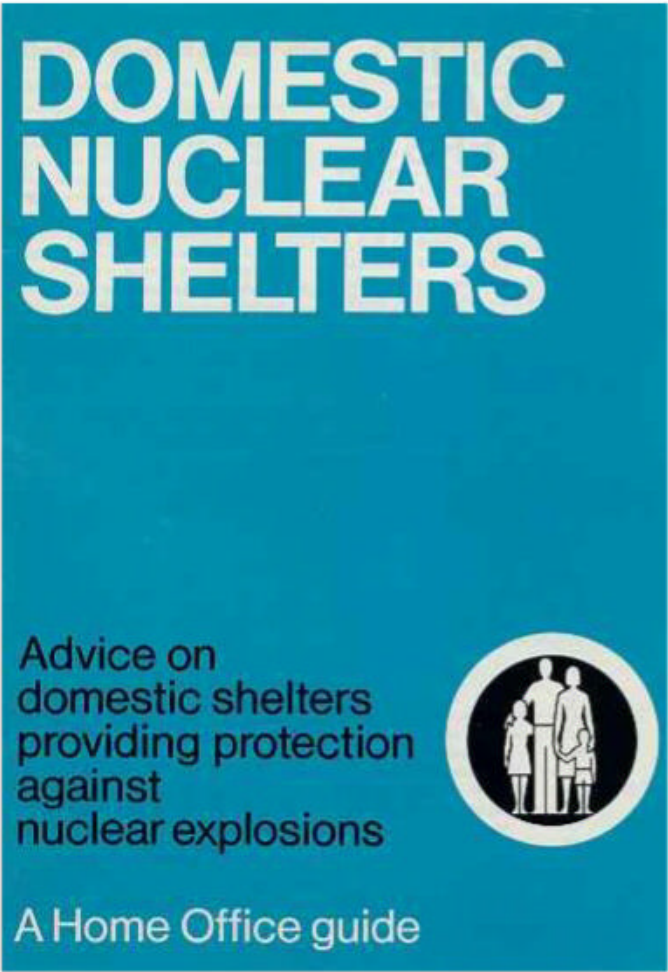
belongings. One of his victims was 84-year-old Isabella Griffiths, whom he robbed and murdered in 1974. The following year, he dispatched 89-year-old widow Adele Price, before murdering Fr Anthony Crean, a kind but foolish Roman Catholic priest, in a bloodbath.

John Lucas rightly points out that there was a surprising number of mysterious unsolved murders in London and the provinces during Mackay’s reign of terror, and it seems likely that his tally of victims is a good deal longer than the three counts of manslaughter for which he was convicted. In *Murder Houses of London* I have speculated that Mackay holds the macabre record of no fewer than six murder houses still standing today.

Mackay was bundled into a prison cell; the key was thrown away. Fast forward 44 years. The key was retrieved in 2019 and Mackay was dusted off and put in an open prison. There was an outcry in the press that such a fiendish serial killer should be on the route to freedom, however, and it appears that at the present time, the 66-year-old Mackay is still behind bars. This book contains everything you need to know about his sanguineous career in the 1970s; it belongs in any larger true crime collection.

Jan Bondeson

★★★





ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Seven Years of Grace
The Inspired Mission of Achsa W Sprague

Sara Rath

University of Wisconsin Press, 2016
Pb, £22.95, 277pp, illus, notes. ISBN 978-0934720663

In the decade before the American Civil War, a young woman named Achsa Sprague toured the States with a lecture programme promoting women’s rights, the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and Spiritualism; one of a small number of itinerant female lecturers. Over seven years, she would perform alone on the stage as a medium, singing hymns and speaking in a trance state. She attracted audiences of thousands who followed her enthusiastically and staunchly faced the inevitable groups of hecklers and sceptics also drawn to such events. Sprague’s story begins with her as a shy, sickly girl barely tolerated by a drunken father. One day in November 1852, she has a vision of angels which boosts her recovery and gives her the sense of purpose she longed for. She embraced the Spiritualist movement and began lecturing. Sara Rath – an award-winning local historian – brings Sprague’s life and activities to life using period documentation from the Vermont Historical Society and other archives, but as a novel. As a technique it works very well and illuminates a curious but influential strand of antebellum America.

Origins of the Sphinx
Celestial Guardian of Pre-Pharaonic Civilization

Robert M Schoch And Robert Bauval

Inner Traditions, 2017
Pb, £17.99, 528pp, illus, colour plates, bib, index. ISBN 9781620555255

If anyone is favourite to solve the riddle of the Great Sphinx of Giza it must be Schoch and Bauval. Both are veteran “Egyptology outsiders” with many provocative books discussing ancient civilisations in general and Egypt in particular and appear here in what the blurb calls “a provocative collaboration” exploring their conviction that the Sphinx is far older than the accepted

timeline of Egyptology allows. This orthodox view holds that it was erected around 2500 BC as a memorial to pharaoh Khafre. The authors disagree. They first show how there is no supportive evidence for this opinion and set out to discover the true ‘when’ and, as just as importantly, ‘why’ in a tightly argued dialogue of articles. Schoch’s updates his well-known theory that an earlier date can be derived from studying the water-weathering patterns of the erosion of the monument, adding new seismic and geological data. Bauval extends his own publicised theory about the constellations of Orion and Leo being used in ancient times to orient important structures. Together, they summarise the significant evidence for an older construction phase at Giza and conclude that the original monument was restored and recurved during the Old Kingdom era. That earlier construction, they demonstrate, was by “an advanced pre-Pharaonic civilisation that existed circa 12,000 years ago” and was contemporaneous with the fascinating Göbekli Tepe complex in Turkey. Schoch and Bauval present a well-written, well-argued and well-illustrated (including 16 colour plates) thesis which deserves serious consideration.

Resonant Mind
The Science, Myth and Magic of Suspension

Peter Adey

Reaktion Books, 2017
Hb, £20.00, 296pp, illus, refs, index. ISBN 9781780237374

This wide-ranging and well-illustrated study is not so much about incidents of levitation as about the ideas of floating, rising up and moving through the air, drawing examples from philosophy, religion, magic, science and popular culture. Author Adey – a professor of Human Geography at the University of London – writes engagingly as he reveals the remarkable depth and extent of these ideas, how they have become embedded in human society, and how they have manifested or been expressed. From the power of ascetic

saints and surrealist art to flying superheroes and astronauts in null-gravity, through today’s CGI tricks with camera or computer, and even further into the future with hovering cities, Adey keeps you thinking. Behind our spiritual, imaginative and scientific lives, the idea of levitation symbolises nothing less than an epiphany, our release from (or triumph over) those forces that ground us or hold us back at the same time revealing the unlimited prospects ahead of us.

Energy, Cold Fusion and Antigravity

Frank Znidarsic

CreateSpace, 2017
PB, £10.45, 133pp, illus, bib. ISBN 9781480270237

As forteans we applaud science mavericks with their self-published theories, whose strident and self-important tones often drown out the intended message of their particular inventions, creations or discoveries. The hope is that among the ‘wacky’ and unorthodox there might be, someday, a truly important insight which will properly challenge orthodox science. Author Znidarsic is a professional electrical engineer who, for years, has monitored claims in the field of cold fusion and ‘anti-gravitational’ experiments. Here he explains why he thinks these might work and how they might be applied. Hopefully, some scientists will read it and respond. If he is in error, learning precisely why might be more informative than the usual blanking such papers get from the Establishment.

Stephen King at the Movies
A Complete History of the Film and Television Adaptations from the Master of Fiction

Ian Nathan

Palazzo, 2019
Hb, 224pp, illus, bib, £25, ISBN 9781786750815

Stephen King may be the biggest name in horror writing, but as he has admitted – in his own survey of the genre, *Danse Macabre*, for example – his early influences came as often from cinema as literature. A book examining the

film adaptations of his work – a sizeable corpus, made up of 65 movies and 30 television shows – would appear to be a useful addition to the King bookshelf; a shame that Ian Nathan’s handsomely produced and nicely illustrated effort falls short of what it promises. There’s certainly little “fresh critical analysis” – this is a handy companion, not a substantial study – and the interviews and “behind the scenes revelations” offer nothing particularly new, deriving from existing sources. The book works better as what Nathan calls a “biography by stealth”, tracing King’s life and career through the screen works that bear his name and tracking the thematic links between the books and movies. It’s worth remembering that for every *Shining* (and King hated Kubrick’s masterpiece) or *Shawshank Redemption* there’s a *Silver Bullet* or a *Dreamcatcher*; the dance between book and film is not always a predictable or happy one. This is useful as an overview, but the lack of index or notes doesn’t help, and the whole thing would have benefitted from a firmer editorial hand.

Abject Quizzery
The Utterly Depressing Quiz Book

Karl Shaw

Old Street Publishing, 2019
Pb, 340pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781910400661

Well, the publishers really should have got this one to us in time for Christmas, shouldn’t they? But it seems somehow apt that a quiz book devoted to the depressing should have arrived so late as to possess absolutely no appeal in the middle of a chilly January. It’s a cynical, seasonal novelty item, with an Eeyore-ish approach and questions devoted to strange deaths, horrible diseases and unpleasant despots through history, as well as more topical reasons to be miserable in the shape of climate change and current world politics. If you know someone who enjoys odd trivia, TV shows like *QI*, or FT sections like *Strange Deaths*, *Mythconceptions* and *Classical Corner*, then you might want to buy this for them in order to cast a pall of gloom over their next festive season.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

At last the origins of Python

Two new releases from the BFI represent the missing links in the evolution of surreal British television comedy, featuring proto-Pythons and soon-to-be Goodies in skits and sketches galore



At Last the 1948 Show / Do Not Adjust Your Set

UK 1967-1969
BFI £24.99 each (DVD)

Seemingly out of nowhere in 1969 sprang *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and in 1970, *The Goodies*. Unless, of course, you'd been avid listeners to *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again*, the wonderful 1960s BBC radio show featuring Tim Brooke-Taylor, John Cleese, Graeme Garden, David Hatch, Jo Kendall and Bill Oddie. But what were the links between *ISIRTA* and the later TV madness? How did we get from Angus Prune and Lady Constance de Coverlet to the Dead Parrot and Kitten Kong?

The answer lies mainly in these two sets of DVDs from the BFI, bringing together the most complete versions since their original broadcast of *At Last the 1948 Show* (1967) and *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1967-69) – far more episodes than on the Boulevard releases in 2005. One of the many remarkable things about watching these shows half a century later is how you don't even notice that they are in black-

"I've got a ferret sticking up my nose, how it got there I can't tell"

and-white!

At Last the 1948 Show featured Cleese, Brooke-Taylor, future Python Graham Chapman and Marty Feldman, with The Lovely Aimi MacDonald introducing sketches – and using the later Python catchphrase "And now for something completely different" in the very first episode.

There are many other links, both backwards and forwards, between the shows. "The Four Yorkshiremen" didn't originate with Python, as is commonly thought, but in 1948. *ISIRTA* fans will remember the "John and Mary" sketches with John Cleese and Jo Kendall as two terribly posh but dysfunctional lovers saying goodbye; Jo Kendall makes a few guest appearances in 1948 including one sketch with the classic John and Mary lines, "Oh John, once we had something good and pure and wonderful. What's happened to it?" "You

spent it all." And there's one link which runs from *ISIRTA* through 1948 to Python: the Ferret Song, with John Cleese solemnly (and quite beautifully) singing "I've got a ferret sticking up my nose (He's got a ferret sticking up his nose), I've got a ferret sticking up my nose, How it got there I can't tell, But now it's there it hurts like hell, And what is more

it radically affects my sense of smell (His sense of smell)..." It's a joy to hear.

Looking back on 1948 from the present day, in the many DVD extras, Cleese says: "We were fed up with clichés, with sketches which started in a particular way and which finished with a punchline. We wanted to break away." Cleese and Chapman were to go on to *Python*, while Brooke-Taylor was joined by old *ISIRTA* colleagues Bill Oddie and Graeme Garden in *The Goodies*. Marty Feldman, who had previously been a writer rather than a performer (the silly names of characters in 1948 are familiar from *Round the Horne*, which he co-wrote with Barry Took), took his own form of creative craziness into his own TV show. And to go full circle, Garden and Brooke-Taylor are still regulars today on Radio 4's *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*.

The rest of the future Pythons are in the other series released by the BFI, *Do Not Adjust Your Set*: Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, along with Denise Coffey (taking full part in sketches, not just introductions) and David Jason – and the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band. Tim Brooke-Taylor appears in one episode as a

last-minute replacement for an ill Palin. The second series included some animations by the final future Python, Terry Gilliam.

DNAYS was broadcast at 5.30 pm, and was aimed at the pre-early evening News children's audience, though it was quickly adopted by students. The sketches tend to be weaker than in 1948, though the humour is often warmer – and certainly not as manic. One episode ends with a touch of satire: the cast singing "I'm Baking Britain", a skit on the current political and social campaign "I'm Backing Britain". Every programme featured a new episode of "Captain Fantastic", with David Jason playing an inept superhero detective. From today's viewpoint this is embarrassingly awful, but it had its own spin-off show after *DNAYS* finished. Jason shines far better for his slapstick comedy, prefiguring his famous falling-through-the-bar as Del Boy; he also does a surprisingly brilliant impersonation of Sixties game show host Hughie Green.

The highlight of every episode was the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, with Viv Stanshall, Neil Innes and the other members giving wonderfully surreal performances. The extras on the DVDs include interviews with several of the Bonzos, as well as some of the cast.

What strikes you now, 50 years later, is how young they all were at the time. Producer Humphrey Barclay (who also produced *ISIRTA*) says: "We had free rein. We behaved ourselves and had a lovely silly time." He continues: "Nobody told us what to do. It was the most extraordinary era of trust... We were given an open playground."

Michael Palin seems to sum up the experience of working on both series: "A very joyful comedy".

David V Barrett





The Mermaid

Dir Svyatoslav Podgaevskiy, Russia
1993

4Digital Cinema, £14.99 (Blu-ray),
£7.99 (DVD), also on demand

The Mermaid is a not terribly good Russian horror effort which gets off to a poor start by not even having a mermaid in it.

Marina (Viktoriya Agalakova), a young Russian woman, is looking forward to her forthcoming marriage to Roma (Efim Petrunin), a talented swimmer. Roma is spirited away by his fun-loving best mate Ilya (Nikita Elenov) to the somewhat run down lakeside summer house Roma and his sister have been given by their father. Unwilling to participate in typical stag night behaviour with the strippers Ilya has arranged, Roma inexplicably goes for a night time swim. There he meets a mysterious young woman who demands to know whether he loves her. He, of course, says no; and thereafter his life becomes a living nightmare because he has unwittingly met a vengeful spirit who, if rejected, will haunt and torment him forever more.

So far, so meh. This collection of horror clichés will please only the least demanding genre fans. It relies on young people behaving in a moronic fashion, cars not starting, predictable jump scares, fake-out endings, and visual tropes that are not so much over-used as completely worn out; if I see another horror film in which the monster is a woman with long, wet hair I'll go postal.

The premise, too, seems ill thought through. The choice presented by the spirit is a lose-lose situation: if you tell her you don't love her, your life becomes hellish; if you tell her you *do* love her, you die instantly. You might as well say yes, just to get it over with.

The photography is pretty good – but then one can say that about most professional films these days – the performances are just about acceptable, and the script never rises above the banal. Clearly this particular 'mermaid' is best avoided – and that goes for the film too.

Daniel King



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

The Beyond

Dir Lucio Fulci, Italy 1981
Shameless Films, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

If your New Year's resolution is to see a bunch of fake spiders eat a plumber's face off, then you're in luck, because Lucio Fulci's influential 1981 horror flick *The Beyond* features one of the most drawn-out meat-eating arachnid scenes in cinema. But if that wasn't enough, it also happens to be a beautifully bonkers plunge into deep Gothic dread.

The story, such as it is, follows Liza, a New Yorker who inherits an old hotel in Louisiana – but like any old building, this one has a few problems. The plumbing's a bit iffy, for a start, and it also sits over the recently opened gateway to Hell.

The Beyond is a classic Fulci cocktail: one part art, one part gross-out schlock and one part funky-ass soundtrack. Sure, the plot may be threadbare ("Hell gate is open... Hell gate must be shut") but the sheer joy is the atmosphere and striking horror set-pieces: you'll see the wandering damned impale, stab, tear and dissolve their hapless human victims. The lack of a logical story, in fact, echoes some of the best work of fellow Italian



It's a beautifully bonkers plunge into deep Gothic dread

horror god Dario Argento. Both directors had the balls to say that when it comes to depicting existential dread, plot should play second fiddle to image and feeling. This Euro-centric embrace of mystery is a pleasing mental gear-shift compared to the ultra-logical, everything-must-be-explained horrors of Hollywood. *The Beyond* says that when Hell fuses with Earth, all bets are off and nothing makes sense

anymore – not even geography. Which is, ironically, a perfectly logical way to play it.

The Beyond is often called Fulci's finest, though for me, *City of the Living Dead* takes that crown (someone barfs up their entire set of internal organs in that one, after all). Yet this really is among his best works, with at least two images from the film now cemented into horror iconography: the Kubrickian shot of a blind woman and her dog, standing in the middle of a deserted highway, and the picture of Hell as a desolate wasteland, strewn with the silent corpses of the damned. Fun fact: those cadavers were played by homeless people who Fulci pulled in from the street. I hope they got paid – or were given a sandwich at the very least.

Shameless Films have released *The Beyond* in a new 2K scan with a nice set of interviews and extras – including four different versions of the prologue presented in different colours (black and white, sepia, colour and combo). But it's the film itself that still shines. With *The Beyond*, Fulci mixed a kind of Southern, almost Lovecraftian, Gothic setting with the visual style and illogical priorities of the Italian sensibility. The result? An unpredictable bounce into Hell that leaves you with a strange spring in your step – especially as the Fabio Frizzi soundtrack kicks in just as those spiders start tearing through the plumber's lips...



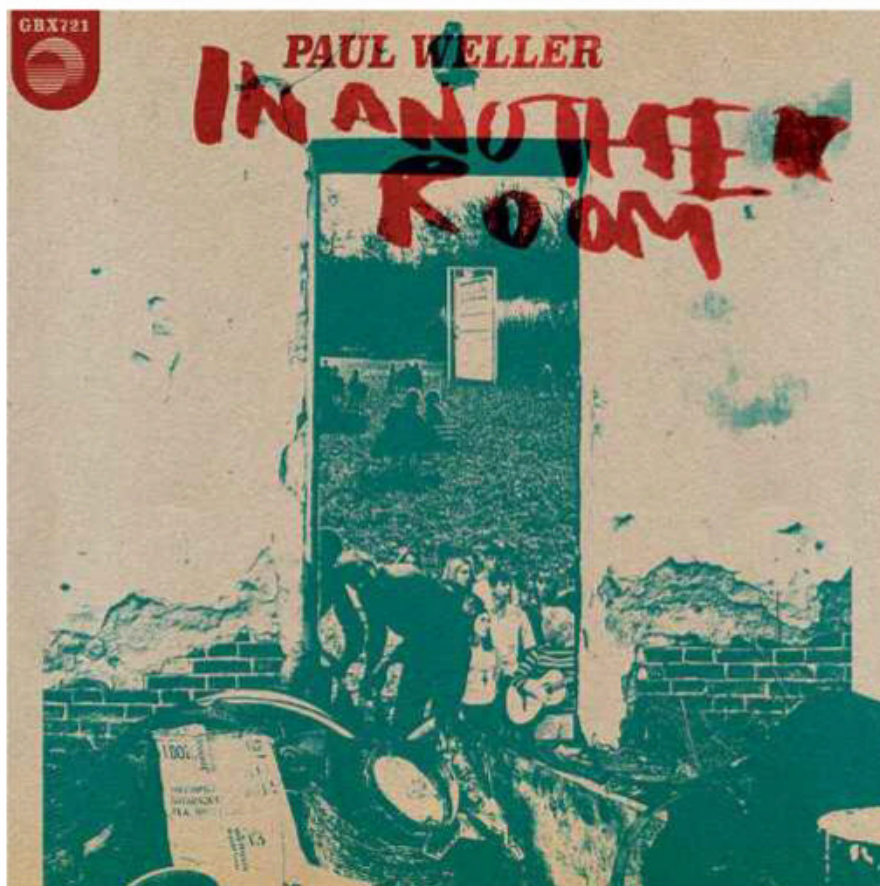
THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"The general reaction from the press seems to be surprise, but also that it makes perfect sense," says Jim Jupp, co-founder of Ghost Box Records. "It certainly does to us. His eclectic career takes in a lot of the areas that are part of the Ghost Box landscape – psychedelia, folk, electronica – and more generally I think it's probably fair to say that his work often re-explores sounds and styles from the past, without them being straight re-enactments. It's a central idea of the label's manifesto. If we had one, that is..."

He's talking about one of the most unexpected musical collaborations of 2020. And some of us have barely taken the Christmas tree down. Ghost Box, the home of haunted electronica stalwarts Belbury Poly, The Focus Group and The Advisory Circle, have teamed up with the Modfather himself. Paul Weller's experimental EP *In Another Room*, released on 31 January, combines abstract sound collage with a distinctly melancholy musicality. Wistful piano passages collide with mournful cellos, all infused with the sounds of distant church bells, summery birdsong, and juddering spirals of disquieting radiophonica. Unsettlingly pastoral, it evokes jumbled memories of crackly Percy Grainger 78s, of Ivor Cutler's wheezing harmonium and the shocked delight of hearing The Beatles' *Revolution 9* for the first time. It is the sound of that late summer's evening walk in the woods, when the darkness settles just that little too quickly for comfort.

"We loved the four tracks he put together," says Jim. "They connect directly to the world of vintage electronic music, *musique concrète* and tape music. But as you'd expect, they add a very musical sensibility, shot through with all kinds of instrumental passages. Sometimes just little sketches or dead ends that wrongfoot the listener. In talking to



me and Julian [House, Jim's Ghost Box co-founder], it was clear that he's very into early experimental electronics. Amongst others, Third Ear Band and Trevor Wishart came up in conversation."

So how did the collaboration come about?

"We discovered through an interview he did for *Shindig* magazine that he was a fan of the label," explains Jim. "And he mentioned to the editor that he'd like to do something for us at some point, so he put us in touch. We were absolutely thrilled and honoured, as you can imagine."

The vinyl 7" is immaculately swathed in House's trademark artwork; gloriously evocative

of some strange, faded textbook in a dusty school library. It's a beautiful object from a gentler, stranger era, and Jim hints tantalisingly at further collaborations. In the meantime, *In Another Room* is available from ghostbox.co.uk.

Elsewhere, the prolific boutique label Spun Out of Control continues to release perfectly-crafted cassettes of eerie electronica, often with impressively high concepts. Glasgow's Alan Sinclair – recording as Repeated Viewing – explains the genesis of his wonderfully sinister new instrumental album *Nature's Revenge*: "The inspiration came to me whilst sitting up a hill in the middle of the beautiful Scottish wilderness," he says. "The rugged landscapes of my homeland provide unparalleled moments of awe, often mixed with a sense of dread as the inevitable foul weather moves in. Is there an underlying narrative? Perhaps a poorly-planned woodland wander gone sour, creepy encounters with strange forest beings, or ramblers frantically fleeing their unfortunate encounters with the 'hill folk'..."

Meanwhile, Rupert Lally's album *The Prospect* provides

the soundtrack to his own short story, the tale of 19th century stagecoach robber Jack Delaney, whose bungled heist in the remote Canadian Rockies sparks a terrifying tale of supernatural visitations and blood sacrifice, all infused with a woozy, dream logic that bleeds into his epic, synth-drenched compositions. And I can't trumpet enough the talents of Spun Out of Control's resident sleeve artist Eric Adrian Lee, whose darkly beautiful artwork is both tasteful and outré, the meeting point between vintage Hammer Horror posters and lurid 1970s prog-rock sleeves. Visit spunoutofcontrol.bandcamp.com/merch.

I've also become entranced by *Wrappers Delight*, a book compiled by Trunk Records' irrepressible Jonny Trunk, showcasing the incredible, house-filling collection of sweet wrappers, crisp packets, drinks cans, bubblegum cards and other 1960s and 1970s ephemera amassed by Stockport man John Townsend. Over 500 of them have been scanned and photographed, and are – ahem – a giddy confection. An overwhelming reminder of the days when Anglia Shandy, Count Dracula lollies and *Doctor Who* sweet cigarettes were produced by tiny factories in Brentford, Slough and Cricklewood, it's also liable to give you an insatiable hankering for the taste of a Rowntree's Fingammy. After a successful crowdfunding campaign, it goes on general sale in February, published by FUEL. More about John Townshend, and other people with 'interesting' collections, next issue...

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter... @bob_fischer

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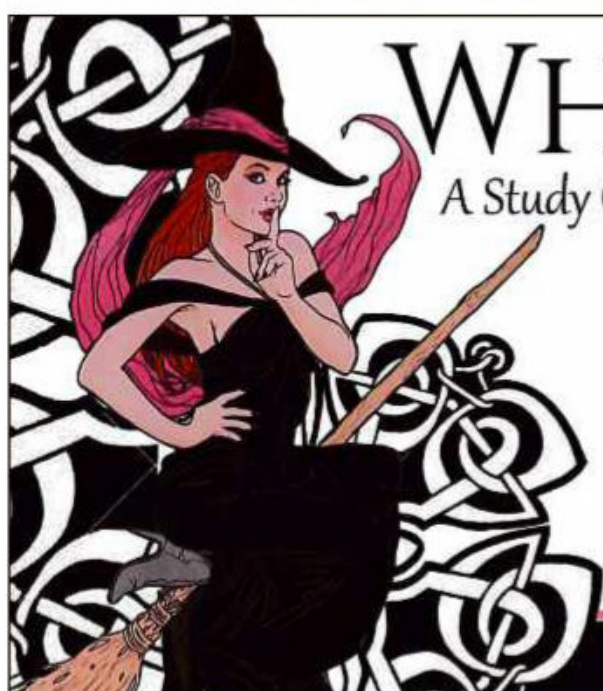
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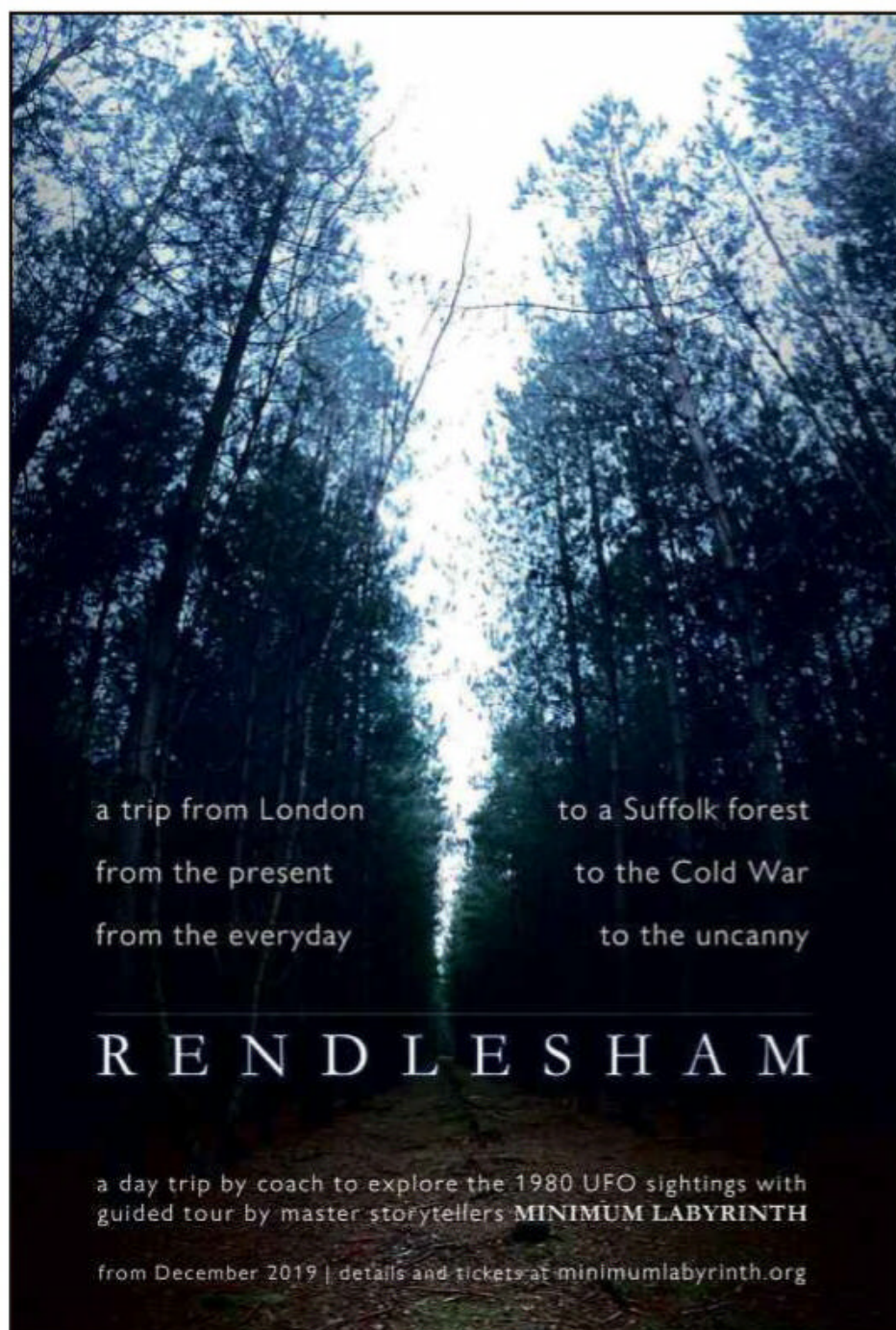
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Smacking noises

The sound of ballerinas' vaginal contractions, whether in outer space or on terra firma (Peter Brookesmith, "Is anybody out there?" **FT387:32**), might have interested Martial, subject of my unheralded doctorate. In poem 18 of Book 7, he describes the poppysmata – smacking noises – emitted by his lover Galla. *Cunus non tacet, ipsa taces*, he writes; "You shut up, but your c—t doesn't". The dependable Mary Roach attributes this sort of thing to air trapped behind the penis during sex (*Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Sex and Science*, 2008, p.264, footnote). Much later, and totally lacking Martial's epigrammatic delicacy, Henry Miller gives us "Squish-squish" (*Tropic of Cancer*, 1934, p.118), and Johnny Rotten described sex as "Two minutes and 52 seconds of squelching noises", which seemed rather reductionist of him.

Richard George

St. Albans, Hertfordshire

Crater & cat

Further to the Astral Bulletin [**FT385:8-9**], there is an article by Jonathan Mayo in *Mail Online* (5 October), giving a theoretical timeline for the Chicxulub impact, which it is widely believed caused the mass dinosaur extinction. Quoting a study from the University of Texas, he states that one day after impact "Debris from the crater is still heading into space at high speed. Within weeks, some of it will be orbiting the Sun. Fragments will eventually land on Mars and on the moons of Saturn and Jupiter. This debris may contain living microbes and so have exported life from Earth into space." That could complicate the search for truly alien life on celestial bodies.

• Regarding the origin of the phrase "to grin like a Cheshire Cat" [**FT387:58-59**], Rob Gandy's cheese theory sounds the most likely to me. You have the image of a grinning cat, and it originates in Cheshire. Simple! (Now, don't get me started on the fact that meerkats are from

SIMULACRA CORNER



Danny Bentham and Kate Firks saw this tree in the grounds of Saltram House in Devon and thought it looked like a witch in profile.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

Africa, not Russia.)

• I enjoyed Mark Greener's review of *Astrobiology* by Andrew May [**FT387:61**]. He makes some good points. However, I think that the evolutionary convergence theory he mentions has some weaknesses in this context. It seems to me that it is only by chance that the human race came to be. Mass extinctions have occurred in the past, one of which eradicated the vast majority of dinosaurs, and it was this that is believed to have brought mammals to prominence. In addition, according to genetic studies, the human population may have dropped to as low as 2,000, about 70,000 years ago.

Similar events may have happened on other planets, so who can say what intelligent

life may have evolved there?

Nature is a remarkable thing, as amply illustrated on our own planet. I think it would be somewhat unimaginative to assume that planets with similar environments to Earth would have human-like intelligent life. There's more than one way to skin a (Cheshire) cat. The aliens in *Star Trek* are usually human-like, for obvious reasons, but that is not real life, although I must admit I avoid wearing red shirts, just in case!

Dave Miles

By email

Fanzines

Just a small correction in Eric Hoffman's review of Steve Moore's book *Selene* [**FT387:64**]. "In 1971

he [Steve] created the first UK fanzine *Orpheus*" is incorrect. There were many fanzines before that, including the excellent *Gothique*, which started in 1965 and the short-lived *Twylight* and *Insight* from 1967 and 1965 respectively. The Horror Film Club of Great Britain produced magazines in the 1960s. My own fanzine *Shadow* was published from 1968. These are a few of the horror oriented 'zines, but there were also many SF magazines in the 1960s and earlier, such as Pete Weston's great *Zenith*.

David A Sutton

Shadow Publishing

Rendlesham errata

Matt Salusbury, writings about the return to Rendlesham of Col. Charles Halt [**FT387:28-29**], states: "It's good to see the UFO community doing basic journalistic fact checking – more is needed in this field." Ironically, he then goes on to get a name wrong: Lt Bruce Ingham should have been Lt Bruce Englund. Later on, when he quotes Col. Halt talking about the use of light-alls, he inserted the word 'torches' in parenthesis. Light-alls are actually trailer-borne units, consisting of a generator and powerful lights, mounted on telescopic poles. They are normally used by maintenance personnel to light up aircraft parking areas and would need a vehicle to move them.

Andy Robertson

St George's Quay, Lancaster

Fortans

As a follow-up to the correspondence on tiny astronauts [**FT387:73-74**], may I refer you to John Wyndham's short story 'Meteor' (published in the collection *The Seeds of Time*). In this, a vessel from Forta arrives on Earth. Its passengers are under instruction to cooperate with and support the natives. However, the vessel, being only a couple of feet across, is taken for a meteor. The Fortans (who resemble four-legged beetles) have unfortunate encounters with a cat and some rats and are finally



Blue Hare

I recently relocated a photograph of something I came across a couple of years ago in a stone circle in Cornwall. I spend a lot of time in Cornwall and visit all the usual sites. A particular favourite is the Trege-seal Stone Circle near St Just. It is fairly off the beaten track and not as visited as some circles, as it takes a decent uphill walk to get there. On this particular day – I think it was around the Summer Solstice – my husband and I were the only visitors. I felt drawn to a small stone inside the main circle and pulled away the undergrowth around its base, revealing something blue. Initially it was so bright I imagined it was perhaps a child's



plastic toy – but it was actually a quite beautiful hand-crafted blue glazed ceramic hare. Obviously it needed to be put

back in its hiding place, but I couldn't resist taking a picture on my phone.

Why was it put there and who hid it? Does it not smack of author Kit Williams and his gold hare from his book *Masquerade*? The hare, of course, is a symbol of the Moon and features strongly in Celtic mythology. I might add that Trege-seal Stone Circle lies just below Carn Kenidjack, also known as the Hooting Cairn and allegedly visited by Alistair Crowley when he came down to the Wild West... This area of Cornwall is exceptionally strange, mysterious and at times totally unfathomable.

Mary Worrall
Birmingham

wiped out by humans using fly-spray. I can't help wondering if John Wyndham was thinking of Charles Fort when he named his aliens.

Martin Jenkins
London

Pleasantly scared

As a child of the Seventies I have been thoroughly enjoying your excellent 'Haunted Generation' correspondence. I can relate to so much of it from the Donald Pleasence-voiced scariest public information film of all time, through *Children of the Stones*, to my treasured Usborne *Myster-*

ies of the Unknown. I first read it when I was about eight and the ghost section scared the bejesus out of me – especially the apparently 'genuine' ghost photos. Even though I now know it's a fake, I pathetically still find it difficult to look at the photo of the skull-faced monk at the altar.

My childhood fascination with fortune-telling was very much fuelled and encouraged by my dad who, at the time, was a BBC producer and in this, Richard Littler's introduction to Borley Rectory completely resonates. From the age of five or six up until I became a 'cool' teenager, my dad and I would go for long

winter walks in the evenings on Durdham Downs in Bristol. He would regale me with anecdotes that he had worked with some of the production team who filmed the recordings in Borley Church in the early Seventies, saying that big, burly cameramen and sound recordists were terrified by what they saw and heard, but wouldn't discuss it. This obviously terrified me too – but I loved it! He also bought me John Sladek's excellent and funny book *The New Apocrypha* when I was about nine and it's still one of my favourite books. I think he tried to implement some critical thinking by doing this, but I was

transfixed by my Usborne book at the time.

We still have a great time at Christmas watching the TV adaptations of MR James – I really enjoyed the article on that too. And on Christmas Eve, my dad with his wonderful voice always reads 'The Night Before Christmas' followed by an MR James story. Sidney Sager, who composed the terrifying theme music to *Children of the Stones*, was a family friend, and you couldn't wish to meet a more self-effacing, lovely man – I would never have thought it possible that he could compose such scary music!

Tracey Stewart
Lydney, Gloucestershire

The War Game

'Bunker Mentality', 'Protect and Survive' and 'The Haunted Generation' in FT379 reminded me of my own teenage experience of dystopia in the early Seventies. As a 14-year-old adolescent, I recall being herded into the school's film theatre to watch *The War Game* during a particular school week near the end of a spring term. The film had been hired (as happened from time to time) by my school, a direct grant school in Bolton, Lancashire. No age-related guidance was in force as no doubt this was classed as a private viewing, even though the BBC had decided not to show the film on air due to its distressing nature and content. The opportunity thus presented itself for teaching staff to skip a lesson or two by cramming their class into the school film theatre, irrespective of the content of the film.

With scant consideration as to whether the film was 'suitable', we were piled in to watch. Unsuspecting, unwarned and relatively naïve, I found *The War Game* to be shocking, profoundly scary and very distressing, as did many others in my year group, although I recall no follow-up discussion. Counselling was, at the time, something only done in the Town Hall.

Not wishing to miss the opportunity for a quick skive, other teachers later in the week



jumped on the bandwagon and rescheduled their class venue to the film theatre, thus forcing the entire class to re-watch this stark, grim, panic-inducing horror twice more, as if seeing it once wasn't bad enough.

I have to say I was in shock for a good few months after watching this faux-documentary horror story. My innocence was well and truly shattered and I felt a gut-wrenching panic every time the local factory siren set off its banshee wail at lunchtime. I couldn't work out why no one was doing anything about the situation – adults, parents, teachers other kids seemed starkly oblivious to the film's bleak projection of the likely future. It coloured my whole summer and indeed for many years following I was very gloomy about the future prospects for Britain, and indeed the whole of humanity. I endured a lengthy feeling of complete detachment, as I felt as though I was the only person who could see what the future held. Certainly I adopted a much more short-term 'live for the minute' attitude, which in retrospect definitely did impact on my studies – and my whole career and life choices. The expectation of the school was that you were to be independent, tough and resilient, so I never mentioned my abject fear and sub-surface near-panic to my parents (teachers would have been the last people you would have confided anything in), or even that I had been forced the film once, let alone three times.

In terms of the haunted generation stuff, the wacky weird or slightly scary TV output was not even a pale shadow of that cast by the themes, threads and stark reality of *The War Game*. In today's litigious age, I often wonder how such psychologically reckless action by teachers would be viewed. I can't imagine staff in secondary schools herding their Year 8s into a showing of an unexpurgated version of, say, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or suchlike for numerous iterations of viewings with impunity.

I never discussed with my parents my deep-rooted fear and chronic mental disturbance

resulting from watching the film. The confidence they had in that the school in providing a progressive caring and supportive environment was left untarnished. However, as a fully paid up member of the haunted – nay traumatised – generation, I held other views. I have often wondered if I should be calling Saul Goodman to seek appropriate redress for what would now undoubtedly pass as a prima facie case of child abuse.

David E Berry
Sheffield, South Yorkshire

Lying

In a review of the film about Theranos ("The Inventor: Out for blood in Silicon Valley") in *New Scientist* (30 Mar 2019, pp42-43), there is a subtle surprise in the penultimate paragraph:

"Perhaps the film's best insight comes from Dan Ariely at Duke University in North Carolina. He describes an experiment in which he asks people to roll dice, telling them they will be paid what the die face shows if it is the number they were thinking of. Of course, people lie – as playing hooked up to a lie detector confirms. If the money is going to charity, players still lie but defeat the lie detector. 'If it's for a good cause, you can still think of yourself as a good person,' says Ariely".

There are at least three things about this that sound awfully wrong: 1 Silly me, I thought the lie detector was the most discredited piece of scientific hardware since the perpetual motion machine... and yet it's still being used in serious research (albeit at Duke) and referenced in *New Scientist*! 2 Lie detector design may have advanced over the years, but I still think it's pretty easy to tell if you're hooked up to one. If so, would you lie if you believed the machine really worked? I sure wouldn't. (On the other hand, if you needed the money and didn't care about the outcome, you might lie anyway – but then you'd probably be so relaxed that the lie wouldn't show up on the detector.) 3 A psychologist whose model of the human mind is so

simple that he thinks people who lie automatically think of themselves as bad persons, can't have been around a lot. Equally, the notion that "giving money to charity" is universally and uncritically regarded as A Good Thing, is laughably naïve. Lots of people don't give money to charities on principle; many more are extremely selective about which charities they support.

All in all, this is only one example of how *New Scientist* often lapses into unscientific thinking. I wish I had collected examples of this over the years – there's usually a couple in each issue – but I'm just too lazy.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Black imp

I greatly enjoyed the Black Imp story [FT386:75]. I have much personal knowledge of Southfields and Engadine Street in particular, as my uncle has lived on the corner of Lavenham Road / Engadine Street for the past 50 years (he is now 72). Previously, my mother lived there as well as my grandparents. I completely agree with Karen McCloud that the houses there are gloomy with an oppressive atmosphere. I felt the same as a child about visiting the bathroom on the first floor, which used to fill me with dread, as I would have to go up the long, dark staircase. The staircase in particular always had an oppressive feeling and I still feel the same way when I visit my uncle's house.

Russell Atkins
By email

No such park

Regarding the review of *Spirits in Stone: The Secrets of Megalithic America* [FT386:59]: Mount Shasta National Park in south Oregon is as imaginary as many of the "alignments"

mentioned by the author of the book, Glenn Kreisberg. While both features are in the Cascades, Crater Lake is in Oregon, and is a National Park. Mount Shasta is in Northern California, 147 miles distant, and is part of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and has the further designation of US National Natural Landmark. They are both interesting places to visit, Crater Lake being just that, a volcanic crater, while Shasta is a volcano, inside which dwell the Lemurians, who venture forth in their spaceships, cleverly disguised as lenticular clouds. (Sorry, couldn't resist). The reviewer's point that long distance alignments in Great Britain are not shown on the map is valid; the identification of the map is not... or did Kreisberg compact the two natural features into an imaginary national park?

Rachel Hazard
By email

Ridiculous!

The article *Zombies, Vampires, Killer Clowns* by Tea Krulos [FT387:57] is one of the most ridiculous articles I have ever read. I hope Krulos was joking. His argument that vampire movies are made during Democratic administrations and zombie movies during Republican administrations is not only poorly researched and illogical, but idiotic. What about movies about ghosts, werewolves, invaders from space, serial killers, etc.? Give me a break!

Gregory Sumrall
By email



LETTERS

Colavito conjecture

Initially I was unsure whether to use the word “conjecture” to describe Mr Colavito’s thoughts as summarised in the UFO files [FT388:30], as the word is frequently used derisively, but I believe it’s a positive use of the word in this instance. He certainly recognises the contradictions inherent in the fixation on governmental recognition that many UFO adherents hold close to their belief systems. May I offer a couple more contradictions?

First off, many people use “UFOs” to speak of something they are sure are alien-controlled vehicles. Ignoring whatever purpose these vehicles may have, my point is that “UFO” is no longer an accurate label as they have been identified by these individuals, correctly or incorrectly – making them IFOs (identified flying objects). Unfortunately “IFO” doesn’t look as cool on paper as “UFO”, which really fits the image of a saucer-shaped spacecraft. Also, being so sure up-front takes away some of the “scientific” veneer of being a rational observer.

Secondly, going along with Colavito’s observations about the fixation on governmental revelations about the “truth”, let’s just consider this alleged situation from ET’s viewpoint. We can assume that whatever technology the presumed aliens possess, they most likely have the ability to monitor our ceaseless electronic chatter of the past 60 years, and so are aware that governments are “hiding the truth”. So my conjecture is this: by not circumventing this massive “cover-up of the truth”, these otherworldly visitors are in effect colluding with these same “evil” governments. Agreeing in effect that we shouldn’t have the “truth”, that we can’t handle the “truth”. Not very appealing to quasi-religious fancies, is it?

Many years ago I befuddled a UFO adherent friend of mine when I told him that I didn’t discount the idea of space visitors but I absolutely didn’t care since they haven’t cared to make themselves important to us

in any practical way. When they open a Space Pizza stand on the corner, come back to me about aliens.

William Hohauser
New York

Delta Blues

Presumably the reason the Mississippi Delta [FT388:16-17] is so named despite actually being an alluvial flood plane is because the latter doesn’t quite have the same ring to it. Can you imagine for example Marc Cohn singing “touched down in the land of the alluvial flood plane blues in the middle of the pouring rain” on his hit song ‘Walking in Memphis’?

Simon Atford
Wiltshire

Secreted horse skull

According to the second edition of the self-published *Spirits of Frederick* by Alyce T Weinberg (1992), the owners of an 1810 stone house in Walkersville, Maryland, discovered during renovations in the 1980s a horse’s skull in the dining-room ceiling.

Weinberg writes: “One day when construction workers were chipping away at the ceiling, one member of the crew reached his hand inside the cracked plaster and pulled out the skeleton of a horse’s head. It was picked clean, bleached and almost intact with its jawbone and some teeth... There is no indication of how the horse might have died, or whether it was a family pet or reliable steed that plowed the fields or whether the bones were found in a field that was cleaned by scavengers. Was it hidden as a ghoulish prank or for more significant reasons?”

Weinberg does not make the connection, but reading this, I immediately thought of FT articles about animal skeletons entombed in old buildings, often at thresholds or within metaphorically important fixtures such as hearths, most likely as magical wards against evil or ill luck. Granted, a horse is a less obvious household protector than the usual cat or dog, but the apparent placement above

the family table seems resonant enough. I must note, however, that Weinberg does not tell us whether the 1980s dining room was used for that purpose as early as 1810.

She goes on to relate that two weeks after the skull’s discovery, the homeowners’ own horse, Dawn, was found dead “of unknown causes”. The homeowners viewed the discovery as an “omen”, a “foreboding of the death of a beloved family pet”. “For Karen Green,” Weinberg writes, “the memories of her own horse and the mysterious dining room skeleton will be inextricably linked.” A superstitious reader would go further, and suggest that disturbing the skull had caused Dawn’s death. In any case, at the time of Weinberg’s writing, “The mystery skull is sitting at the bottom of a closet, waiting to be mounted as a conversation piece.”

I cannot make this a conversation piece with Weinberg, who died in 1987, so I thought I’d present it to FT readers instead. I also recommend her slim, engaging book to anyone interested in the lore of Appalachia or the mid-Atlantic states. Moreover, now that I am promoted to full professor and in theory empowered to be as eccentric as I like, I would be pleased to hear from any readers with knowledge of forteana in western Maryland or the surrounding region. My postal address is c/o the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Frostburg State University, 101 Braddock Road, Frostburg MD 21532, and my email address is arducan@frostburg.edu.

Prof Andy Duncan
Frostburg State University,
Maryland

Scientific Spoofs

Having worked on chemoreception, I read David Hambling’s piece on human pheromones [FT384:15] with interest. Olfactants have been claimed to affect various types of human behaviour for a long time; so why not a contraceptive that could be sniffed? In 1965 a JS Greenstein published a spoof paper in a respected journal about a

fictitious contraceptive that had its effect via the olfactory system¹. He called his invention Armpitin and gave it a chemical formula that included several nitroso groups (represented by the symbol NO). The more NOs there were the more effective the chemical was as a contraceptive. The paper was apparently seriously reviewed in an annual review of Pharmacology, and Greenstein was said to have received various requests from pharmaceutical companies about the patent. If anyone really took this seriously, they couldn’t have picked up on clues in the title or bothered to read the references. One sentence read: “One must also admit to a measure of inspiration that can only be described as heaven-sent” – and carried a reference to a personal communication from a certain Gabriel, A.

Many forteans will know Isaac Asimov’s spoofs in *Astounding Science Fiction* on a time-travelling molecule² and a goose that lays golden eggs,³ but those published in ‘serious’ scientific journals can be even more fortean. A favourite of mine is one on dragons by Peter Hogarth. Not only is the paper⁴ fun but a follow-up review⁵ and a response⁶ from the author were both published in the eminent journal *Nature*.

NOTES

1 Julius S Greenstein, ‘Studies on a New, Peerless Contraceptive Agent: A Preliminary and Final Report’ (*Canad. Med. Ass. J.*, 25 Dec 1965, vol.93, pp1351-1355).

2 I Asimov, ‘The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline’ (*Astounding Science Fiction*, Mar 1948).

3 I Asimov, ‘Pate de Foie Gras’ (*Astounding Science Fiction*, Sept 1956).

4 Peter Hogarth, ‘Ecological Aspects of Dragons’ (*Bull. Brit. Ecol. Soc.* 1976, vol.7(2), pp2-5).

5 Robert M May, ‘The Ecology of Dragons’ (*Nature*, 4 Dec 1976, vol.264, pp16-17).

6 Peter Hogarth, “The Ecology of Dragons: a reply’ (*Nature*, 16 Dec 1976, vol.264, p607).

Ron Gardner
Upton Snodsbury,
Worcestershire

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers



THOMAS TOLKIEN / CREATIVE COMMONS

Fear of the Oubliette

In August 1997, when I was 13 years old, I went on a short holiday with my parents and two brothers, staying for four nights at the St Briavels Castle Youth Hostel in the Forest of Dean. The castle is a Grade I listed ancient monument, over 800 years old, once King John's Hunting Lodge. One reason we had chosen to go there was because it held mediæval banquets, and this gave all the family the opportunity to dress up and have fun.

I knew nothing about the castle itself beforehand, but when we arrived I felt apprehensive as we crossed the courtyard, and uncomfortable while at the reception. We were directed to the Family Room and, as was my way, I was at the front of our group carrying our luggage, eager to see the room; but as we entered the corridor leading to the room I felt extremely unnerved, and a bit cold and nervous – which made me retreat to the back of everyone. I didn't want to go into the room, and had to be 'forced' in. We noticed that the name on the door of the Family Room was 'Oubliette'. We knew that this was French, but we had all forgotten what it might mean (pun intended). Under a rug in the middle of the wooden floor, we found a trapdoor. Naturally, we all had a go at trying to open it, but it was clearly locked. Later I found that I wanted to keep my distance from it.

My elder brother John and I slept in the bunk while my parents and younger brother Chris slept in the three separate beds. Every night I found it very difficult to sleep properly, and both John and I borrowed extra bed covers and quilts because we felt so cold, even though it was summer. Also, the two of us felt as though we were being watched. I point blank refused to be in the room on my own at any time during our stay – either we all had to leave the room together or someone had to stay with me. I felt great relief when I was out of the room.

On the evening of the mediæval banquet, we were all sitting in the dining room when Dad realised that he had left his camera back in our room and asked me to go and fetch it. I literally felt cold from head to foot and refused to go. It ended up with John accompanying me, and we stuck together like glue. When we got there John stayed in the doorway while I dashed in and grabbed the camera. I ran out and then both of us ran up the corridor back towards the dining room. It felt as if I were being chased.

On the morning of our departure, we packed our things and had breakfast. As there was a ghost tour organised for a little later, we hung on to take part. The guide was full of stories about ghostly babies, grey ladies, the hanging room and various phantoms, which included

knights in armour and a black dog. But after each story, with mock terror, he said that he was saving the most haunted part of the castle until the very end. As we were heading for this finale we realised that we were going down the corridor to the Family Room, where our packed luggage was still in place. As he opened the door, the guide announced this as being the most haunted room. Everyone piled in as the guide removed the rug, unlocked the trapdoor and opened it to reveal a very deep dungeon, only accessible through the trapdoor. He explained that this was an oubliette – hence the name of the room – a dungeon where prisoners were dropped (some of them died from the fall) and then forgotten. Of course, the name derives from the French word 'oublier' which means 'to forget'. Both my parents murmured, "Ah, now I remember". Apparently, in this way, lords could agree that they would not kill hostages, but by dropping them in an oubliette they simply 'forgot' about them; so they could not be accused of having killed them, even though the hostages ended up dead.

The guide said that it was boys in their early teenage years who were most affected by the room, and generally felt uneasy when there. This was ascribed to many boys of a similar age – who were thieves, hostages or whatever – being thrown into the oubliette and left to die. So I had been staying in the most

haunted room of the reputedly most haunted castle in the country, and I was at the most susceptible age.

David Gandy
Lancaster

Monsieur Duval's revenant?

On 1 August 2019, my husband, my son (12) and his cousins (nine and 13) stayed up relatively late to watch TV. I went to bed much earlier than them. The next morning, the older cousin told me that, when he finally went to bed, he had seen a man going out of my bedroom and entering another room directly across the landing (my husband was still in the living-room at the time). We laughed about it and forgot the whole thing until the following week, when I read an obituary in my local newspaper announcing that the former owner of my house, Monsieur Duval, had died. Although he died on 27 July, I immediately got goosebumps and nearly shouted "It was Monsieur Duval's ghost!" to my husband and son. I knew that my bedroom was the previous owner's bedroom when he was married, and that after his divorce (that is when we bought the house), he had moved across the landing...

I cannot help but think that the following story is linked to Monsieur Duval's passing.

When we bought the house in 1998, we found a litter of nearly feral kittens in the barn. We managed to adopt one, which became a very sweet yet fearful domestic cat. We called her Prunelle. She was still in good health until the beginning of August, when she gradually stopped eating. I took her to the vet, who found nothing alarming, even after a blood sample, and rehydrated her. Her guess was that Prunelle, 21, was just dying of old age. And she did indeed die a few days after that, one month after Monsieur Duval, as if an era had to be closed with his passing.

Catherine Dupont
Habergy, Belgium

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past features the amazing story of a cat that apparently walked from London to Rugby.



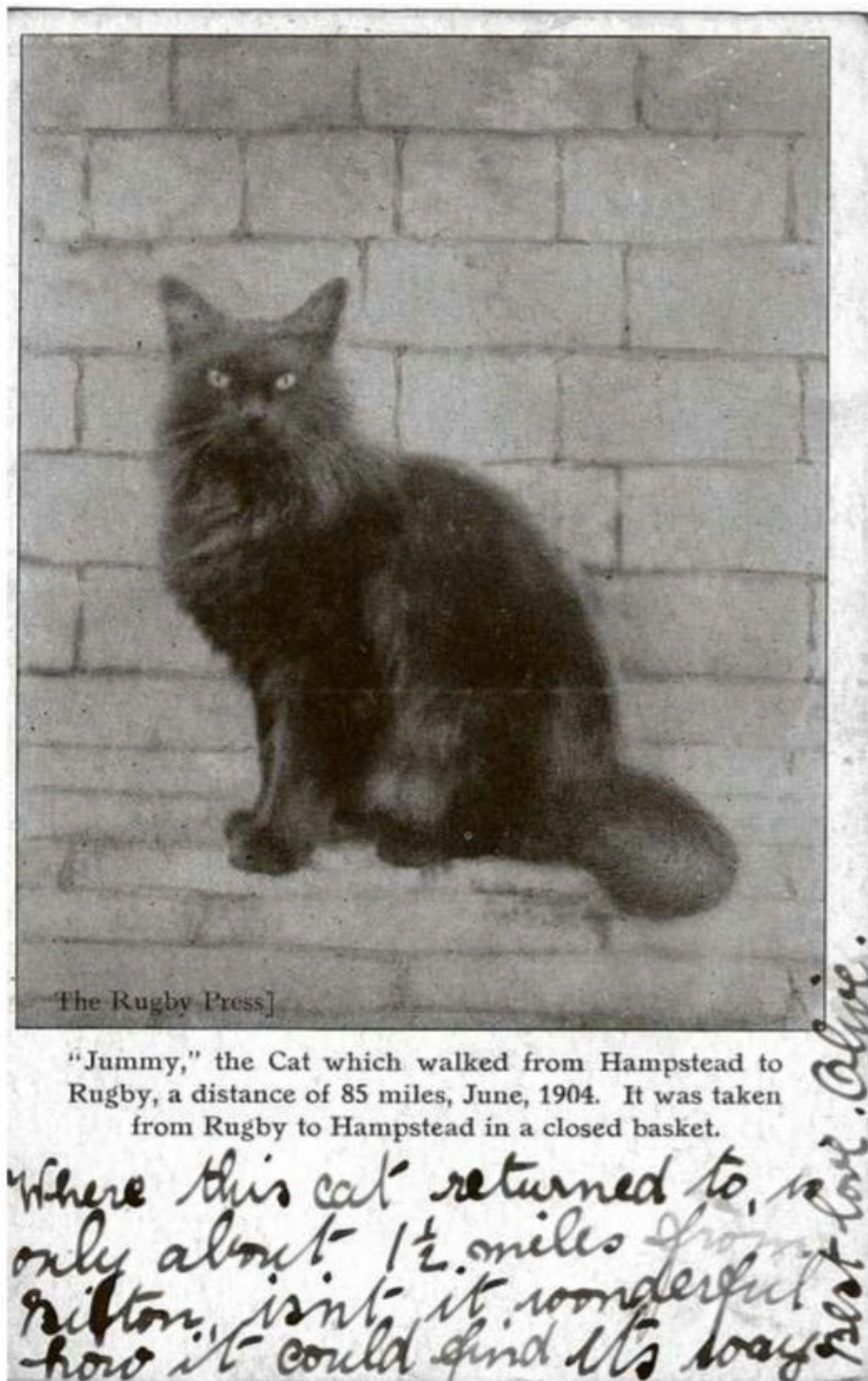
1. JUMMY THE HOMING CAT

Just look at him: a sleek and superior black cat looking his admirers straight in the eye, as if asking them: "When did you last walk from Hampstead to Rugby? Well, when did you, peasant?"

The story is that in 1904, Mr Mark Robinson moved from Overslade near Rugby to 9 Belsize Grove, Hampstead. He brought with him his family and belongings, including his wife's black cat Jummy. Mr Robinson thought that Jummy did not care much for London life, preferring his old country surroundings. He also thought that this extraordinary cat objected to some furniture being moved into the house: taking great affront at this, Jummy simply vanished, and did not return home.

Two weeks later, Jummy was found in Rugby, looking a little thin and rough-coated, but otherwise quite unaffected by what was presumed to have been an 85-mile (137km) tramp through the perilous countryside. By some stratagem or other, people recognised him as Mr Robinson's cat, and he was returned to Hampstead. There was immediate newspaper interest in this remarkable cat, for it was of course thought that Jummy had wanted to return to his old neighbourhood in Overslade. The cat must have been guided by some mysterious homing instinct during its long journey, since it had never exhibited any nomadic tendencies in the past, and since it had been brought from Overslade to Hampstead in a closed basket.

Jummy's great feat was described in the London evening newspapers, some of which included a photograph of the cat, and the story even spread to the United States,



ABOVE: A postcard stamped and posted on 5 December 1904, featuring Jummy, the homing cat. **TOP RIGHT:** A 1904 report from the *Plain Dealer* (taken from the *Philadelphia Record*) reveals that Jummy's "remarkable" achievement was considered newsworthy on the other side of the Atlantic.

Australia and New Zealand. The cat's walking feat was considered as one of the wonders of the feline world of 1904. This was the height of the Edwardian postcard craze, so Jummy was of course depicted on one of these cards, with a caption celebrating his 85-mile

walk; this card may well have had limited circulation, and is today uncommonly met with.

Unbelievers in newspaper yarns about homing animals, and scoffers at tales of feline hyperpedestrianism, may well point out that the Grand Union Canal is just a comfortable

A CAT'S WALKING FEAT. It Tramped Eighty-Five Miles to Regain Its Home.

What is probably another record has been created, this time by a cat, which has walked from London to Overslade, near Rugby, a distance of eighty-five miles.

"Jummy," as the "tramp" is called, belongs to Mrs. Mark Robinson of No. 9 Belsize Grove, Hampstead, and is just an ordinary medium sized cat. Although seven years old, says the *London Mail*, "Jummy" had never before displayed any marked nomadic tendency, its previous ramblings having always been confined to the neighborhood of its home.

About the beginning of June Mr. Robinson brought the cat to Hampstead from Overslade, and it was at once apparent that "Jummy" like the Rev. Spalding, didn't like London. The climax came when some furniture was moved into the house. This was too much, and "Jummy" took his departure.

Nothing more was heard of it until about a fortnight ago, when news came from Overslade that "Jummy" had returned, its coat a trifle rough, its limbs a trifle thinner, but "Jummy" nevertheless.

As the cat was brought to London in a closed basket, its achievement in walking back is really remarkable.

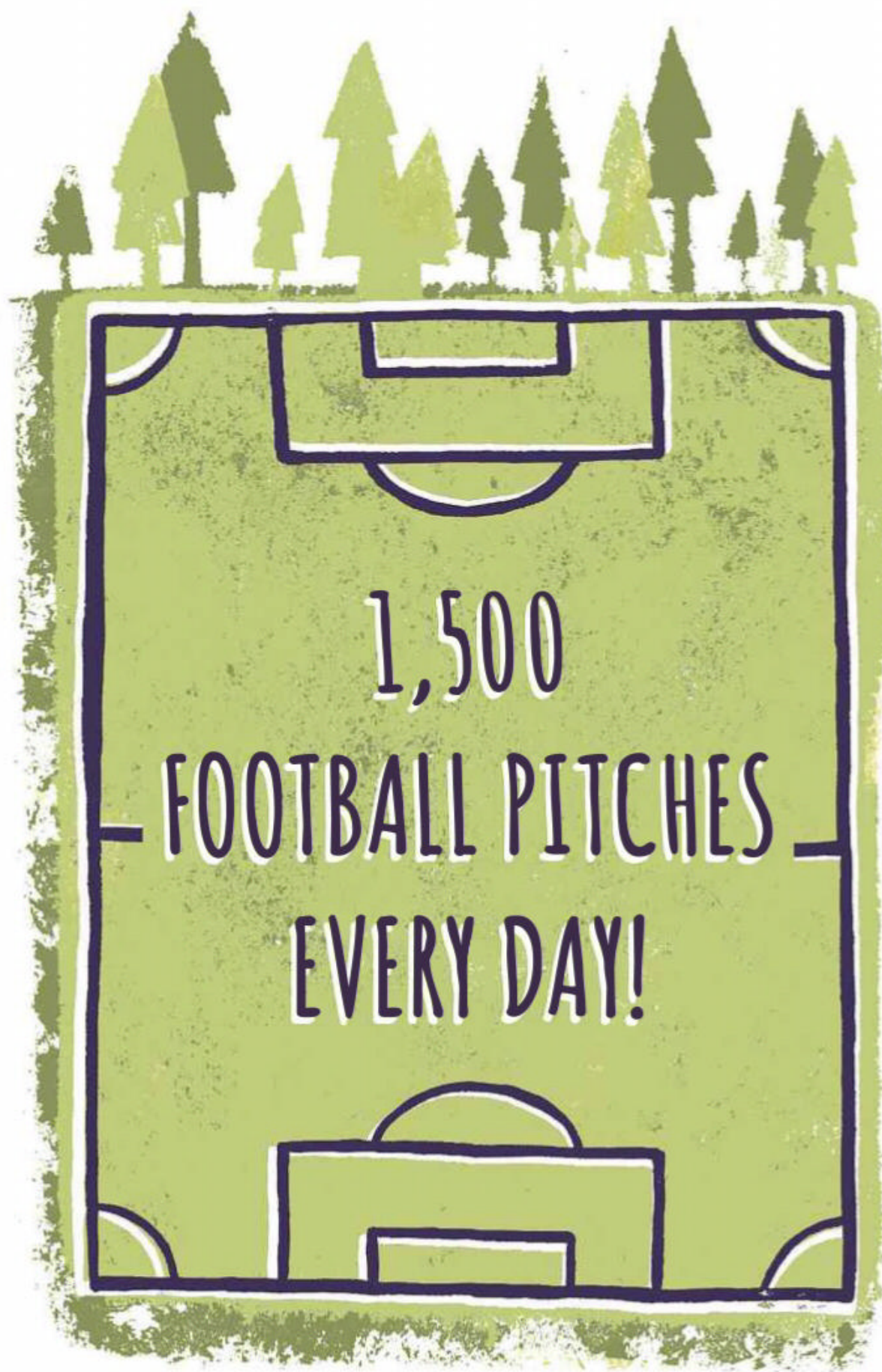
"Jummy" has a rival in the walking craze, for a cat belonging to a friend of Mr. Robinson walked from Rugby to Leamington and was seen wandering about the empty house there, which its owner had left. It has since returned to Rugby, having taken three months for the double journey.—*Philadelphia Record*.

stroll away from Belsize Grove, and that back in 1904, there was a plentiful supply of canal boats, some of which were destined for Rugby. It was marvelled that Jummy did not seem at all footsore or worse for wear after his presumed walking feat, and the reason for this is likely to be that he had travelled in comfort as a stowaway on a canal boat.

Only the inscrutable Jummy himself knew the truth about his presumed homing tendencies: did the postcard celebrating this extraordinary cat carry a true statement of facts, or should its inscription instead have paraphrased Pope's Monumental musings:

*Where London's feline,
pointing at the skies
Like a tall bully, lifts the
head, and lies?*

For further accounts of feline hyperpedestrianism, see FT61:46-49, 158:22, 159:10, 199:14-15, 282:24-25, 255:6, 360:8-9.



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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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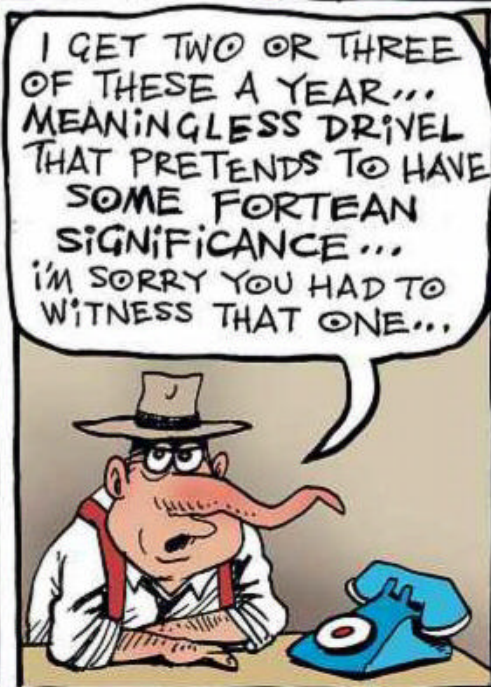
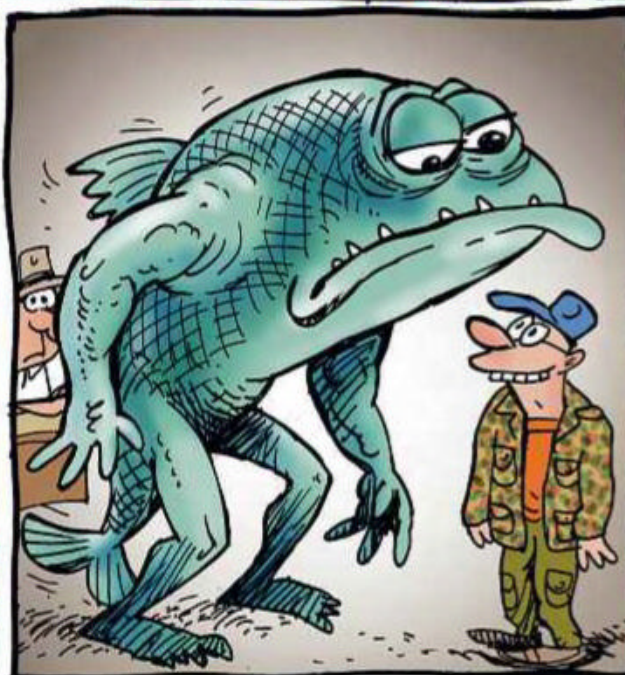
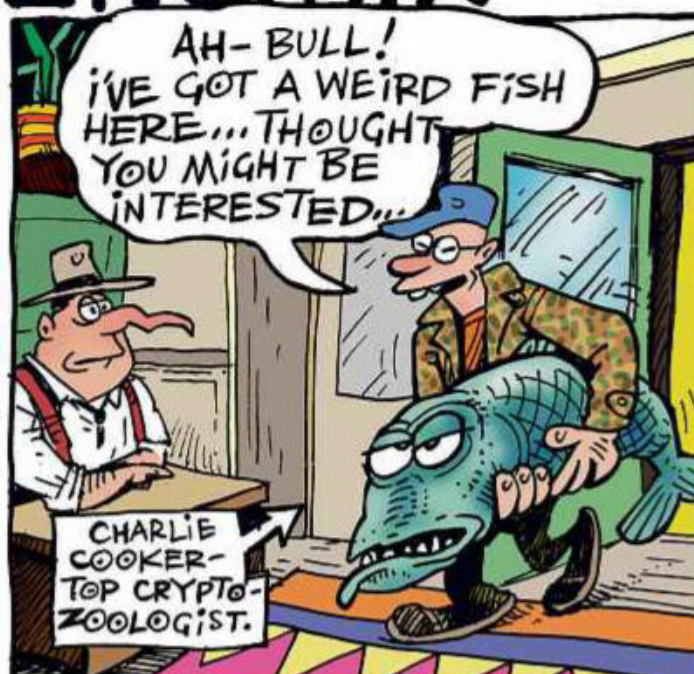
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PHENOMENOMIX

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COMING NEXT MONTH



MARK OF THE WITCH

IN SEARCH OF BRITAIN'S RITUAL
PROTECTION SYMBOLS



COLLECTING MANIA

WHEN THE EPHEMERAL
BECOMES ALL TOO PERMANENT



VANISHING PENISES,
SUTTON HOO SPIRITS,
EXORCISING NESSIE
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 390

ON SALE 27 FEB 2020

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A 76-year-old woman in South Australia was collecting eggs on her rural property when an aggressive cock began pecking at her lower left leg. This led to a significant hæmorrhage, which caused her to collapse. An autopsy revealed two small lacerations on her leg, one of which was over a large varicose vein. She had evidently died from exsanguination due to bleeding from the varicose vein. She had several underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure and type two diabetes. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 2 Sept; *livescience.com*, 4 Sept 2019.

A 59-year-old Texan woman bled to death early one Sunday morning after she was attacked by wild hogs on exiting her car in the town of Anahuac, 40 miles (65km) east of Houston. Christine Rollins was visiting an 84-year-old woman whom she regularly cared for; when she didn't enter at the usual time, the woman went outside and found her lying in the yard with different sized bites on her body, which suggested an attack by more than one animal. By the time police had arrived, Rollins had already bled to death. Around three million of the USA's estimated six million wild hogs live in Texas. They can weigh more than 90kg (14st) and are very powerful. Deaths by wild hog are extremely rare; a 2013 study found only four fatalities in the history of the USA, three of which had taken place during hog hunts. *news.sky.com*, 27 Nov 2019.

A 63-year-old man in Germany died from a rare infection after being licked by his dog. Doctors subsequently warned pet owners to seek urgent medical advice if they experienced unusual flu-like symptoms. The previously healthy man died from multi-organ failure a few weeks after he was licked (but not bitten or otherwise injured). He had been infected with *capnocytophaga canimorsus*, a bacterium found in the saliva and gums of dogs and cats, which can sometimes be transmitted to humans. If contracted, the infection is fatal in around 25 per cent of cases, said doctors from Bremen's Rote Kreuz Hospital, although bite infections caused by this bacterium are rare. Severe or fatal infections usually only affect persons with suppressed immune systems or alcohol problems.

After three days of fever and respiratory difficulties, the unnamed man was

admitted to hospital and treated with antibiotics, but his condition deteriorated whilst medical staff tried to work out the cause of his symptoms. He also had acute kidney injury and signs of liver dysfunction, and was placed in intensive care, but his condition worsened over the next 30 hours as he developed encephalopathy (brain disease) and paralytic ileus (intestinal muscle paralysis). On his fourth day in hospital, *capnocytophaga canimorsus* was diagnosed from blood tests and doctors increased the man's antibiotic regime. But his brain began swelling, and abdomen scans indicated the shutting down of blood flow to some vital organs. The man's family in consultation with his doctors then decided to cease treatment, and life support was turned off 16 days after treatment had begun. *news.sky.com*, 27 Nov 2019.

An elephant caused the death of a Buddhist monk during a religious procession in June 2017 at the coastal town of Kochchikade, Sri Lanka, 26 miles (42km) north of Colombo. One of three colourfully dressed elephants went on a rampage and attacked the 25-year-old monk, who died in hospital the next day. In July 2017 an elephant trained to give rides to tourists at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe's main holiday resort, charged at and killed one of its handlers. Enock Kufandada, 50, had worked at the resort for over 10 years, whilst Mbanje, the 30-year-old bull elephant responsible for his death, had been giving rides to tourists earlier that day. Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority rangers subsequently shot and killed Mbanhje.

Glynnis Vaughan, chief inspector of the Zimbabwe National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ZNSPCA) said that African elephants could never be domesticated and described the practice as "vicious" and "cruel". In September 2017 a man was crushed to death by an elephant in the Sundigarh district of Odisha, eastern India. Locals say they were already in the process of driving away the angered elephant when Ashok Bharti, 54, approached them and attempted to take a selfie of himself and the animal when it turned on him. The critically injured man was rescued but died in hospital. *D.Telegraph*, 13 June, 25 July; *indiatimes.com*, 3 Sept 2017.



Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



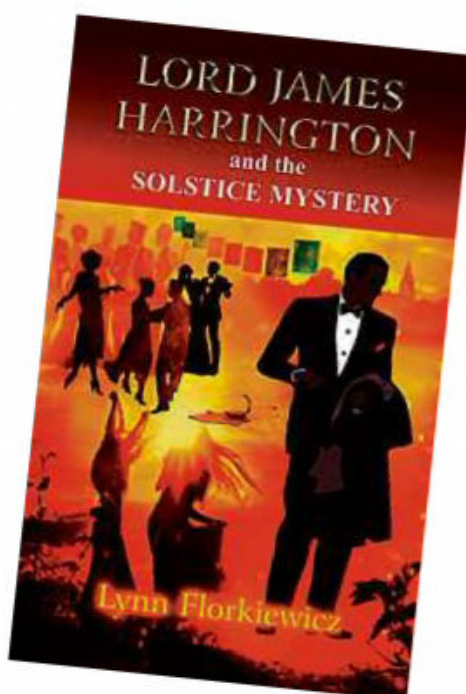
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - The Quest for the Crystal Skulls, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (The Quest for the Crystal Skulls is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, The Winter Mystery, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on nine book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a tenth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well

as from Lord Harrington's very own website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call – 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT19

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